

A STORY OF
American Life and Character.

TREBOR.



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AS IT MAY HAPPEN.

A STORY OF

AMERICAN LIFE AND CHARACTER.

BY TREBOR.

"Every man is odd."—SHAKESPEARE.



PORTER & COATES,
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AS IT MAY HAPPEN.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE COUPLE.

THE village of Slowville had within its boundary-line two strange characters, who, for a long time, had successfully resisted all attempts to discover their history, or explore the mystery of their daily lives. Yet every man and woman, and almost every child in the village, had either seen or knew something about Nicholas Grundle and his companion, Emily—a girl whose great beauty was the engrossing topic among the young and old men of that region. Of this mysterious couple the people of Slowville really knew but little, and that little this: Nicholas Grundle was old, ugly, and, so far as his character could be judged by limited means of observation, a miser. He lived in a small house, already tottering to its ruin, some two miles from the village, with no companions in this lonely home except a beautiful girl, verging on womanhood, a sharp-fanged mastiff, and a double-barreled gun.

Beyond these facts, gained by several years of persistent and anxious observation, the public of Slowville had been unable, in their eager desire and search for information, to find out anything about the domestic life of this man and girl, between whom there was such a great contrast of age and appearance. Six years ago, Nicholas Grundle had come to the village, in company with the child and an old woman, and bought the home where he now was. From the first he had been an intensely secretive man, neither asking nor answering questions, nor allowing any intercourse, the most trivial, between his companions and the villagers. Since the death of this old woman, some

four years after he had entered this abode, Nicholas Grundle had grown even more secretive, if that were possible to one who had already made the world a blank to himself and his remaining companion. During these past two years, no one, on any pretense—and repeated were the attempts by those who pitied the girl, or longed for a sight of her beauty—had been allowed to enter his home. Whether with stranger or acquaintance—friends he had none—he always transacted his business either in the front yard, or, if writing were necessary, at a little rickety secretary in his barn, where an old cow, with one stumpy horn, was the sole witness of the business in hand. In this dusty receptacle, covered with hay seed or stray wisps of straw, were scraps of writing paper, evidently torn from some old ledger. A small bottle of ink, without a label, stood in the corner, the fluid in which had been so many times diluted with vinegar that it looked paler in its tracery than even the blood that flowed sluggishly in the veins of the old miser's hand. In another corner lay a pen, made of an old goose-quill, that sputtered continually when he made his signature, as if it were protesting against giving so mean a name a visible form.

Not only did Nicholas Grundle so jealously guard the privacy of his house, but it was also impossible for anybody, not even the mild and wary parson, to draw him into a conversation that touched in the slightest particular upon matters pertaining to himself personally, or his beautiful companion, or their mode of living. To such a questioner—and one now seldom presented himself, unless he were a stranger by the wayside—the old man, whistling for his dog, would make such an angry reply that the interrogator instantly bethought himself how soonest to get out of the man's reach, without further exciting his ire, or arousing that of the grim, growling beast beside him. Nor were people, even those of her own sex, any more successful in endeavoring, through the girl, to gratify their curiosity, or relieve their anxiety, concerning the relations between the old man and herself. She treated all such inquiries as he did, and, turning away her drooping blue eyes, would answer no questions, no matter how kindly or gently

put, that bore upon the mystery of their intercourse. As if to be safer from all such questionings, she always kept within sight or hearing of her strange associate when any one came to the house. And to further guard her secret, she never ventured outside of the garden-gate unless she were in the company of the old man or the dog, who, in like manner as his master, warned away, with a dangerous gleam in his eyes, any one who dared approach his charge.

This, then, was all the villagers knew of the life of Nicholas Grundle and the fair maiden who was his counterpart in all that was secretive and reserved. Beyond these apparent facts, all that rumor incessantly repeated about the strange pair was mere inference and speculation. Nor could the tales that were told every night at the Green Tree Inn, of the questionable and suspicious proceedings in "old Grundle's hut," ever be traced to one who could say he had himself seen them, or who was able, when closely pressed, to give the source of his information; for, during the night as well as the day, the interior of this secret dwelling, its thick board shutters tightly closed, was shrouded in a mystery that the skillful eye of the shrewdest explorer of dark retreats could not pierce. If one should come that way at night—and sometimes a curious and daring villager, not afraid of the old woman's unmarked grave in the corner of the yard, would reconnoitre the silent premises—he could see there no signs of life except a faint wreath of smoke, that floated away in some weird shape from the ragged, toppling chimney. And if, perchance, growing more bold in spite of the undefined fear that crept over him, he should venture as far as the garden-gate, he would not stay long to listen to the low growl of the mastiff within, which sound alone broke the tomb-like silence of the place; for no one ever heard the soft, quick steps of the miser, when, thus alarmed, he caught up his gun, and hastened to his outlook, a half-concealed window in the second story. Here, placing his threatening eye against a large hole cut in the bottom of the shutter, he had ample field for the range of his vision, or the deadly weapon that trembled in his hand.

Such was the mystery that surrounded the life in old Grundle's hut. Although the grievously disappointed

and exasperated villagers had used every means but force to solve it, they were, at the end of their six years' effort in this direction, no wiser than when they began; for all they knew of what took place within its walls, Nicholas Grundle's house might as well have been a pyramid in the desert.

By one who was coming down the road, straight to this dwelling, a few of its secrets had been fathomed, and by him enough of its inner life was known to make him more than ever resolved that this night he would talk face to face with Nicholas Grundle, and if possible force him to a satisfactory answer in the matter so soon to be at issue between them. He was a young man of about twenty years, though his intellectual face and prominent forehead gave him a far older appearance, and seldom was his countenance without that grave expression which betokens the busy and thoughtful mind. His sensitive chin and lips were slightly bearded, while his thick brows half concealed eyes as black as the night in which he walked. He carried in his hand, soft and fair as a woman's, a hickory stick, which he swung with nervous energy, now gripping it more firmly, as his brows knitted in doubt or half-suppressed anger, or twirling it as lightly as if it were a twig, when his eyes flashed with a brighter light, and a ray of kindling hope played for an instant across his features. Dark and silent as the night was—for neither moon nor stars were visible, and dense clouds enveloped the heavens—he seemed at no loss to find his way, but walked on as surely and steadily as if the noonday sun were shining upon him. He now turned from the road and went straight as an arrow to Nicholas Grundle's garden-gate. Unfastening this, and shutting it with a loud noise to announce his coming, he strode up the path. A moment later he leaped upon the step, and rapped firmly yet gently upon the weather-beaten door.

CHAPTER II.

WHO WAS THE STRANGER?

FROM the last passenger train that passed through the outskirts of Slowville this day, there alighted a single passenger, a tall, black-bearded man, who, leaping from the car before it had stopped, disappeared in the dark shadow of the Station. There for an instant he stood, taking his bearings with a quickness and keenness of vision that in one sweep, despite the gathering night, comprehended all the surroundings of the place, and assured him of the direction of the village, as well as of its general conformation. Across the railroad track, and beyond him about half a mile, were the houses of Slowville, nestling on the top and slope of a steep hill, and from the rows of light that twinkled from the dwellings on either side of a broad, dark space, he saw there was but one street, and that a straight one, up the hill, and through the middle of the town. Looking more intently, as if in search of it, he detected, with the trifle of a smile, a dull, red light, which some intervening object had hitherto obscured. This light he knew, from long familiarity with those of its kind, to be the tavern-lamp. Taking this as his guide, he cautiously emerged from his concealment, and, satisfied that his arrival had been unobserved by the station-master, made his way into the main road, and hurried on to the village.

Here, to his evident satisfaction—for he shrugged his shoulders, with a complacent air—he found the street entirely deserted. The people had long since congregated, for some public meeting, in the Town Hall, at the farther end of the village. Approaching the tavern with a stealthy step, he crept to one of the front windows, from which streamed a bright light, and looked in beneath the half-drawn curtain. A single glance was enough. He opened the door and entered.

It was the usual bar-room of a country tavern. A large stove, glowing with an unattended fire, stood in the centre of the apartment, and around it were grouped, in the disorder left by recent guests, chairs, old, whittled and

battered, and large, square boxes, spittoons evidently none too capacious for their use. Under one of the windows was a wide bench, with a buffalo robe stretched upon it, and a couple of horse-blankets rolled up at one of its ends, as if this arrangement served as a bed for some one about the premises. On the walls were the usual decorations of prints, in many colors, of noted prize-fighters, their brawny forms stripped to the waist; celebrated horses, in all the various positions of the race-course—winners, all of them; and here and there, as if to cater solely for amateurs in female beauty, were the graceful forms and fairer faces of notorious women of ancient and modern times. Nor were there wanting pictures of famous dogs, ready poised for the fight in which they had earned their celebrity; or of bulls and cows, rams and ewes, cocks and hens, which had all won prizes in the different agricultural fairs. Indeed, in the lowest order of æsthetic art, this picture gallery of the Green Tree Inn lacked nothing that its frequenters could desire, save the occasional notices of a sheriff's sale which intruded for a week or so upon its walls.

The traveler, tossing his valise upon a chair, rapidly glanced around the room, and then, with a loud "Hem!" advanced to the bar, behind the counter of which was just visible a head, covered with a shock of sandy hair, which belonged to a young man, fast asleep.

"Hello! business must be dull, if you can afford to sleep so early in the evening," said the newcomer, as the youth opened his eyes with a listless yawn, and, like an old man, rose slowly to his feet, letting his chair fall back upon the floor.

"Yes," with another and a longer yawn, as he stretched his arms over his head; "biz is off just now. All the fellows are over at the Lyceum to-night. They won't be back under a couple of hours; so I thought I'd take a quiet snooze, by way of a change. This tending bar all day and up to midnight makes a fellow snatch at a chance to sleep, like a hungry dog at a stray bone. But I say, stranger, excuse me," placing a tumbler on the bar, and turning toward the array of bottles on the shelf in his rear; "what will you have? We've got good liquors,

and I can mix you anything you want, from the best punch down to a simple gin and sugar. Nothing like a man knowing his business; and, thanks to my experience and observation, and 'The Barkeeper's Guide and Universal Mixer,' you will find me up in mine. But hold up; my tongue is running away with me. They all say I've got a forty-horse power tongue. What was it you said you would take?"

"I didn't intend to take anything just now; but as you are such a clever, sociable fellow, I can't refuse. Suppose you make me a Scotch whiskey punch, in your best style, and mix one for yourself at the same time. Clinked glasses, you know, make a merry drink."

"Now you *do* talk! You're a city chap, I can see. Not that I always drink with a customer, but I like to be asked by a gentleman such as you are, and there's mighty few of your kind that comes to the Green Tree, I can tell you."

"Have a cigar?" asked the stranger, unbuttoning his coat, which displayed the plain and neat attire of a gentleman, and taking from his pocket a cigar case, which he opened and extended to the young man, who was already vigorously at work with his concoctions.

"Thank you! Don't care if I do!" taking one, and snuffing up its odor with an appreciative nod, as he lighted a match. "That is a cigar—a regular Havana. Smells like a June rose. Whew!"—blowing out a puff of its blue, fragrant smoke—"it's fit for a duke, it is! But," suddenly resuming his labors, "here I am again, talking away like old Gagger at the Lyceum. And they've got a question there to-night that suits him to a dot, you can bet—something about believing the Bible."

"What Gagger is that?" asked the man, with a slight start and a sudden increase of attention in his face, which the young man did not notice; for he was just now giving the finishing circular touches of two delicate pieces of lemon rind to his productions.

"Why, Silas Gagger, who lives about two miles out on the pike. He's as cross as he is conceited! Thinks he knows more than all the people in Slowville put together. If the world would only do as he says, I believe he thinks

it would get along without law or gospel. But I tell you the world could get along—leastwise this part of it here in Slowville—better without than with him. He's always attending to everybody's business but his own. Between you and me, there's lots of folk here would take a very willing hand in shoveling dirt into his grave; and no one would make the dirt fly more lively"—lowering his voice into a confidential whisper as he leaned over the bar—"than his wife. Take me for a noodle, but she is a handsome woman! Eyes like stars, and lips— Whew! talk of strawberries and cream! There, see how you like that punch!" pushing the steaming glass toward the man, who had been suddenly seized with a fit of coughing, and had stepped back a pace or two with averted face, his hand, with a jeweled finger, which instantly caught Dibbs' attention, shading his eyes. "What's the matter? I never saw a cough take a man so on a sudden as that. Here, a swallow of this punch will cure it."

"Oh, it's nothing! Only a frog in my throat," rejoined the other, with a light laugh, taking up the glass and slowly sipping its contents. "That is a good punch. You are what I should call a whiskeyrjal artist. It's a pity, my young man, your abilities cannot display themselves in a better field than this. You ought to have a bar in some big city. You would make your fortune there."

"That's just my lay. I'm hiving money for that very same. If things work all right, I'm going down to Philadelphia next year and try my hand at a bar of my own. I am bound to be rich, I am. Worse fellows than I have made their fortunes in cities. Are you from Philadelphia? Perhaps you know of some good saloon there I could buy out, say a year from now."

"No, I am not from Philadelphia, but my business often calls me there. I will bear in mind what you have said. Should I see a good opening for a fellow of your genius, I will drop you a line."

"Thank you, thank you! You're the first man that ever took an interest in Bill Dibbs, and I want to shake hands with you," stretching his broad, wet palm across the counter.

The other gave it a hearty grasp, and reiterated, in the

strongest manner, his good opinion of, and still better intentions toward, the young man, who was now beaming upon him with a look of mingled gratitude and admiration.

"Would you let me see that ring?" said Dibbs, pointing at the jewel.

"Certainly," rejoined the other, extending his hand to the curious Dibbs, who examined the ring with exclamations of pleasure.

"That's a mighty odd ring—a snake, with two rubies for eyes," commented Dibbs, as he released the man's hand, but still kept his eyes on the jewel. "I wouldn't mind owning one like it."

"If you had such a ring, you would be in luck," rejoined the stranger, with a significant and mysterious look. "Some day I may tell you the history of this ring. There is not another like it in the world. But come, friend Dibbs, let us sit down and have a little chat. I am a great lover of gossip—worse than a woman in that respect—and would like to hear what's going on in this town. I suppose you have an odd character or two here, like all villages—some one that everybody talks about?"

"Indeed we have," replied the youth, lying back in one chair, and cocking his feet high upon another, while he puffed away at his cigar. "There is old Nicholas Grundle, the miser, and the sweetest girl you ever saw, Emily, that lives with him. Take me for a noodle, but she is a beauty! Just my style—hair like gold, and eyes blue as the sky. But, pshaw!" with something like a sigh and a hopeless shake of the head, "it's no use of my pining after her. She is kept too close for courting; and, besides, Volney Slade has got the inside track there; and he passed the three-quarter pole long ago—"

"Slade! What Slade? It seems to me that name is familiar!" interrupted the stranger, with a slight cough, but not stirring from his half-concealed seat behind the stove, where he sat in an arm-chair, throwing out clouds of cigar smoke, that obscured his features and completely veiled the alternating expression of surprise and excited interest that played rapidly across them.

"Why, Volney Slade is old Gagger's stepson. Before

old Gagger married the Widow Slade, five years ago, she had this son Volney by her first husband, whose name, they say, was Seth Slade, and he was lost, so I heard old Gagger tell my boss, in one of the Pacific steamers, seven years ago. She didn't wait for her dear Seth to get very cold, did she? I tell you, you can't depend on these handsome widows to keep single more than a year or two—especially if the first husband was poor and the second one comes along with a bag of gold under each arm. Widows are always in training, they are—and that's where they have the advantage over the girls."

The stranger had risen from his seat and crossed over to the bar, where he poured out a glass of water, and with the same averted face as before, he was a long while in quenching his thirst. Then he returned to his chair and with a laugh as forced as it was hollow, bade his companion go on with his story and his observations.

"I say, my good fellow," he added, "you are the best story-teller I have met in many a day; you are brief, but you don't omit any of the points of interest in your narrations, and your observations would do credit to an older head."

Excited to greater efforts by this compliment, the youth now opened up, without the slightest reserve, his budget of gossip and rumor, and in profusion of statement or minuteness of detail he proved himself no feeble historian or biographer of the eccentric people of Slowville. In the next half-hour his companion was in possession of all that was at that time known or surmised in Slowville concerning Nicholas Grundle and Emily, his wealth and her relations to him; Silas Gagger, and his many crotchets; his second wife, her beauty and secluded life; and the stepson, whose requited love for Emily made him the envy of the men, married or single, as Dibbs expressed it, for miles around. With this information, supplemented by descriptions of Grundle's hut and Gagger's farm-house, the location of which the loquacious and ready Dibbs traced with a cane on the sanded floor, the stranger arose, buttoned up his coat, and took his valise, an odd-looking affair, in his hand.

"Why I thought you were going to stay at the Green

Tree all night?" said the youth, disappointed and surprised at the sudden preparations for departure.

"So I am," he replied. "I have some business to transact at the village store. Then I may stray over to the Lyceum for a little while. You can look for me in about two hours from now. Have a fire and light in my room. I will immediately go to it when I return."

So saying, he went out, and disappeared down the street from the view of the young man, who watched him from the tavern-door, wondering who he was and what had brought him to Slowville.

"Take me for a noodle, what a fool I was!" he muttered, going back into the bar-room with a violent slam of the door. "Here I let him pump me for an hour, and I never so much as asked him his name. Well, I'll get even with him when he comes back, and I'll find out who he is, or Bill Dibbs will be a noodle, sure. And what a queer-looking valise he had!" he continued, musingly. "It had three locks on it. I counted them, and the whole thing looked as if it was made out of sheet iron. I'll bet he's got valuables in that. Egad, I would like to see inside that valise. Well, if I am smart, maybe I'll get a chance."

Then Dibbs shuffled into his seat behind the bar, and began to guess what the man might be, and what he might be carrying around in that strong, iron-bound valise.

In the mean time the stranger had passed through the deepest shadows of the street, stealing along in the darkness like one in search of hiding. He neither turned toward the store nor gave more than a hasty glance at the Lyceum, but going by them with rapid steps, he took the direction of the country road. Along this he strode with a flushed face, for his heart beat rapidly and sent the blood bounding to his temples. Yet there was little of passion in his countenance—nothing more than a hard, cruel smile hovering about his lips, such as one would wear who knew that his presence in the farm-house of Silas Gagger would this night be both a terror and a triumph.

CHAPTER III.

A GLIMPSE INTO THE WAYSIDE HUT.

“YOU are cruel—very cruel to me!” she moaned, in a voice that ought to have touched his heart with pity, as she sank down at his feet and buried her face on his knees, weeping so silently that her sobs were scarcely audible.

The old man was silent, and made no reply. Unutterable anger and reproach were in his eyes, and voiceless contempt curled his lip. At any other time her tears would have moved him, and he would have laid a caressing touch upon the fair head that was pillowed so close to him. But now, overpowered by feelings he could not express, he brought his thin hands together in a convulsive clasp, and falling back in his chair, gazed with a look of utter desolation at the dim fire, which, even as he bent his eyes upon it, flickered faintly upon the hearth and then expired, leaving the room in darkness. A congenial darkness to both—he with his hopes that had received this night such a sudden promise of ruin, and she with fears that now increased with a strange indefiniteness of form.

At length he spoke. Pushing her away from him with no gentle thrust of his hand, he rose to his feet. He tottered across the floor in the dim light of the rekindling fire, looking back all the while at where she lay beside his chair, and when he had reached the farther end of the room, he said: “So this is your gratitude, is it? This your thanks for all my years of love and care? Oh, Emily, Emily!” As he uttered her name, there seemed to come something of a woman’s tenderness into his voice—a deep yet loving reproach.

She sprang to her feet at these words, and ran to him with a little cry of joy. She threw her arms about his neck and kissed him, and begged him not to judge her so harshly, imploring him to still believe that she loved him.

“You know, dear father, how I love you!” she cried, holding on to him, with her soft arms twined more closely

about him, as he strove to put her away from him. "Dear father, don't push me away—your own little Emily! I know I cannot repay you for all you have been to me—so kind, so good, such a dear, gentle father! Forgive me, father dear, if I have annoyed you in loving him. I did not mean to—I could not help it. He—he—made—me—love him!"

Blushing at this confession—why, she knew not, for it was as honest as her heart was pure—she hid her scarlet cheek upon his breast.

These last words brought back the angry look which her former pleading had driven from his face.

He gave a bitter laugh, one of scorn, that ended in a muttered curse, as, with all the strength of his feeble frame, he hurled her from him. Then, without so much as a glance at her, as she reeled across the room and sank with a low cry into her chair, he took up a candle and lighted it at the fireplace, and turned to the door that led to the cellar. The dog, who had been until now a silent spectator of what had occurred, rose from his place by the outer door and came toward his master.

"So you, too, are false to me, are you? I should have called you Judas, instead of Cæsar," said the old man, as he gave the animal a fierce kick, and ordered him back to his station at the front door. The dog, for the first time in his life, showed his teeth in a low growl at his master, and then slowly turned away, his eyes still fixed upon him, and with a defiant motion, laid himself down at the feet of the young girl. Nicholas Grundle, with an oath, caught up his gun, and, quickly bringing it to his shoulder, leveled it at the dog; but, before he could fire, the girl threw herself in front of the animal, and begged for his life, even as if she were begging for her own. He slowly lowered the weapon, and, without a word beyond a curse upon them both, he unlocked, with a large key he took from his pocket, the cellar-door, and disappeared, with the candle in one hand and the gun in the other, bolting the door after him.

When he had reached the cellar, which was a damp, empty place, without window or other outlet, except the door above, he first satisfied himself, peering into every

corner, that he was alone. Yet who and what had he to fear? What interest could this vault have to any one save himself? Even Emily had never been in it, nor wished to pry into its secret, since he took sole possession of the place, six years ago, and forbade her ever even alluding to it in his presence, or trying to find out in his absence what might be its great attraction to him. She had her suspicions of what he did there, and that was all. She had never endeavored in any way to confirm them; for as she grew older, and thought more and more for herself, they only aroused her pity, not her curiosity.

It was a strange resort for an old man, this vault, not over a dozen feet square, and scarcely a man's height. It was filled with boxes and barrels of all sizes in every condition of decay. They lay about the floor in no apparent order, but, covered with dust and cobwebs, they were heaped in one place and scattered in another, as if they were so much useless lumber; yet to their owner they were as useful as the bars and bolts of a vault in any bank. Some of the smaller ones were empty, while many of the larger ones, especially those at the bottom of the different piles, were filled with refuse straw and hay, old tins, pieces of iron, horseshoes, nails, rags of all kinds, and many other such things, which one might gather who gleaned the earth of what men had cast away.

Placing his candle on the floor, and laying his gun, half-cocked, beside it, he seated himself upon a box in the midst of these strange treasures. He looked about him, carefully noting by turn each box and barrel with a cunning smile. Yes, there they all were! Not one had been moved an inch from its place. He rubbed his withered hands with great glee, shaking his head with a muttered chuckle of approbation, which he quickly repressed, lest even this might betray his secret to some listening ear. Under the very best conditions of darkness, seclusion and silence, he never felt wholly secure. But now his face took on a quiet look of exultation, as he picked up the candle and moved on tiptoe to a corner of the cellar, where one large empty box stood against the wall. Upon this box his eyes were soon riveted with a

gaze as intense and questioning as if it had the power of answering him. And it had!

Coming closer with the light, he carefully examined the exact position of this box, measuring with his finger its distance from the wall at both ends—at one end an inch. at the other two, not a fraction more or less. There were several straws resting upon the edge of this box. To any one else they would have appeared to be there by chance, but Nicholas Grundle knew just how every one of them had been laid by his own hand, so that the slightest movement of the box would have caused each and every one of them to fall. Yes, every straw, a silent and faithful sentinel, was in its place. No need to look for footprints around the box. Yet he did so, groping with his candle—not half so bright as his own keen eyes—over every inch of the vacant ground that surrounded it. There was no sign of a stranger's tread. The earth was just as he had left it the night before, ready to take any imprint, and none had come.

What a sigh of relief came from his thin lips! But was he certain? Perhaps! Glancing for just an instant behind the box, his eyes kindled with an intense light of joy. Yes, his secret was safe—his treasure undisturbed! He still had it in his keeping. No eye had seen it—no hand had touched it! With a smile that mellowed for a moment his hard features, he went trembling back to his seat. It always made him tremble, this assuring himself that he had not lost his treasure; for, guard it as he did, he never felt certain that, in some way—how, he could not even imagine—it had not been discovered. And if it were discovered? He clasped his hands in terror at the thought. To have threatened his life would not have made him so quake with fear. But it was there—all there. The box had not been moved; the stone—he barely thought the word, so great a secret was it—had not been touched. Behind it, all was safe. Even now, as his eyes turned upon the spot, glowing with the avarice that burned in his breast like a hot, consuming fire, he could see his treasure—ay, feel it, fondle it, kiss it, hug it, worship it; for what god so filled his thoughts, by day and night?

Suddenly, as he heard the girl move overhead, a change came over his face. The smile went out of it, disappearing under the frown of his knitting brows. A curse came from his lips, and after a look of anger thrown upward, where he knew she was sitting, he dropped his head upon his hands and closed his eyes. He must think now what it was best for him to do, and he could not think at all with his eyes open—for, cast them where he would, in his attempt to think on other things, he could fix his gaze nowhere save on that box. Yet, like a great staring eye itself, it seemed to fill every range of his vision, even when he turned his back upon it and tightly closed his eyes, as he did now. How luminous was the stone behind the box! In this retreat he had never sat so long and silently before. A strange figure he was, seated there, his spare white locks falling down over his hands, in which his head was clasped—a small head, with a forehead that sloped away from his temples, and gave no sign of intellectual or moral strength. Over his small and shriveled form the light of the candle fluttered with weird shadows, peering here and there, with a brighter gleam, into the holes and rents of his tattered garments, or making a hiding-place of his ragged shoes, that, tied from heel to toe with twine, scarcely covered the nakedness of his feet. Whatever the plan might have been which he was thinking over, it was now evident, from his agitation, that his conclusion had not been reached without a great sacrifice of his feelings and desires; for, as he at last rose from his seat, he stood there, undecided as to what he should do, turning, with a perplexed face, first toward the stairs, and then resting his eyes, with that avaricious gleam, upon the box. How could he, after so many years of successful concealment, let any eyes but his own see his treasures? Could he trust even her to keep his secret? Had she not already deceived him? But if he should tell her all, and show her what should some day be hers, would she not cling to him, as she had ever done, and let her wild dreams go with the young man who had conjured them up for her? Yes, he was sure of it! She was a sensible girl; for had he not taught her as no child was ever taught, moulding every opinion, guiding every thought? Had she not

learned from his own lips, ever since she was old enough to understand, how cold, and cruel, and selfish the world was—the world that bought and sold everything for gold?

With a confident shake of his head, he took up gun and candle, and made his way up stairs, and as he entered the room the face he turned upon her was as kind as she remembered ever to have seen it. She came to him, and again put her arms about his neck, and kissed him. “You forgive me, father? You will let me love you still? You will not say again that I am an ungrateful child?”

He took her soft, round face in his two hands, and looked down into her eyes, where the tears were still welling. It was a long, searching gaze that he poured into those eyes, as if he there might still read something she had not told him; but out of their blue depths there came no sign of fear, or shame, or deceit. Only a yearning, sad look was there, imploring his forgiveness.

“I was too hasty, my child,” he spoke, at last, kissing her cheek, into which the crimson tide was again flowing. “You still love me, I see; you are again my little Emily—my own loving and obedient child.”

“I never loved you more than I do now, father. You will never say again that I do not love you.”

“No—not if you will tell him, when next you see him, that you do not care for him; that you cannot listen to him any more; that you have no room in your heart for him—it all belongs to me. You will tell him this?”

Back went the red tide from her face, and a pallor crept over it, even as a chill ran through her heart at his words. Her head drooped upon his breast, and he felt her form tremble and quiver, as if in fear and pain; and it was both. He knew it.

“Come, child, be yourself again. You need not answer me now. I have something to tell you to-night—something to—to show you,” lowering his voice to a whisper; “and when I have told you all, and you have seen all, then you may tell me what you will say to this fellow who would rob your poor old father of all he has in the world—his only child, his only comfort, his only joy!”

He suddenly ceased speaking, and intently listened to some sound his ear had just caught. There now came

footsteps on the garden-walk—a man's step, quick yet regular. The dog, who had already been moving uneasily in his place, with ears erect, now ran to the door, and instantly began to show signs of friendly recognition, which did not escape the old man.

“So he is coming! I thought perhaps he would not dare it,” said Nicholas Grundle, turning to the girl with a grim smile; “but”—catching her arm with a grasp that buried itself in the flesh—“you will not see him to-night. No, no! we will not see him now! Tell him to come to-morrow night. We will answer him then.”

The girl made no reply. What could she say, with him now looking at her so threateningly, his face darkening with anger as the steps drew nearer? There was a look of entreaty on her face which her lips refused to express; but the grasp on her arm tightened, and he muttered, between his set teeth:

“Tell him to go away! Tell him to come for his answer to-morrow night!”

He ran softly to the corner where his gun stood and picked it up, his eyes fastened on her all the while; while she, with parted lips, and hands pressed upon her beating heart, stood transfixed with fear. What might he not do? There came a rap upon the door. The dog whined as he ran his nose along the sill, and then, with a bound, was at the girl's side, barking up at her and wagging his tail. The old man, leaning on the barrel of his gun, fixed his eyes upon his child. Raising his hand, with a warning gesture, he whispered, in a voice full of passion: “Do as I bid you! Tell him to go! Tell him to come to-morrow night!”

Again there was a heavier rap. A hand was laid upon the latch, rattling it violently, and something pressed heavily against the locked and cross-barred door. And now a gentle kick upon the lower panel told that he without was determined upon being heard and admitted. The old man sprang lightly across the room, and, standing beside the girl, raised his weapon, leveling it at the door, and said, in a voice so tremulous and hollow that it startled her into instant action: “Unless you tell him to go, I shall fire!”

She thrust aside the weapon with a smothered cry, and ran to the door, calling to him outside: "Volney! Volney! go away to-night, I pray you! Come back to-morrow night!"

"Emily," was the quick reply, in a voice as steady as hers was broken, "open the door. I must see your father to-night! Come"—after a pause—"open the door, I say. Why do you refuse to let me in? Are you jesting with me? I am in no mood for that."

"Oh no, no!" she cried, wringing her hands with wild dismay, as she glanced behind her and saw the gun poised so steadily in the direction of the voice that had spoken to her. "No, I am not jesting; but here, on my bended knees, I beg, I pray you to go away! Please—please go!"

After a short silence, he asked: "Emily, is it your wish that I should now go away, and come back to-morrow night? Or is your father there, making you say these words after him? If he is prompting you, I shall stay here till you open the door."

"Go away to-night! Do—do go!" he heard her say, "for my sake. If you"—she hesitated, and then went on, in a tone that thrilled him with its tender entreaty—"if you care for me, go away to-night!"

"For your sake, then, I go. Heaven knows how much I love you!" and his strong, manly voice vibrated with the powerful emotions her voice and near presence had aroused. "Because you ask me to go away, and come again to-morrow, I will not refuse to go. Good-night to you, and good-night to your father!"

And as her "Good-night!" came back to him in a sudden tone of thankfulness, he leaped from the step and hurried away, taking the direction of the village. He had no fears for her. Her father, he knew, loved her too well to do her harm. His fears, if any, were for himself. As he pursued his way, he tried to find a satisfactory reason for his having been thus refused admittance to Nicholas Grundle's hut.

CHAPTER IV.

WHO WAS THE MAN?

AT this time, the sitting-room in Silas Gagger's farmhouse was a very cheerful spot. It might be windy, and cold, and dark outside, but here, at least, was comfort, if heat and light could make it. A rousing wood-fire snapped, and glowed, and roared in the ample chimney-place, leaping now and then as high as the crane, and wrapping the empty hooks in its yellow-white flames. What a glorious fire it was! so warm, so bright, throwing its genial heat far out into the room, until the dark-carpeted floor, the grimy walls, the narrow windows, the straight-backed, staring chairs, and even the sombre old clock, with its monotonous and melancholy tick, seemed to have for once broken out into one broad smile of enjoyment. But while the fire made itself thus sociable with all else in the room, it could not drive away the frown from the face of the woman who sat in front of it. That frown had been there an hour at least, and it acted very much as if it had come to stay. For, strangest of all, when the fire burned brightest, the frown deepened, forming sterner lines about the full lips, and sending darker looks from the black eyes, that flashed back defiance to the ruddy blaze.

A woman of middle age; hair black and luxuriant, yet not without a trace of gray; skin fair as a girl's, and glowing with a warm tint on rounded cheek, and arching brow, and forehead smooth as satin. Her fine, intellectual head rested upon a neck delicate in every curve, while the slightly-drooping plumpness of the shoulders, perfect in their outlines, gave full promise of a tall and graceful figure, cast in beauty's rarest mould. Such was the woman who sat alone in front of the farm-house fire. Her white, tapering hands were crossed upon her lap, her beauty enhanced, if beauty could be more than this, by the plainness of her surroundings. And the extreme simplicity of her attire—a black gown, without ornament of any kind, save the white frills about her neck and wrists—drew

attention all the more to the comeliness of her form, and the striking brilliancy of her face, a radiance that even her frowns could not conceal.

A door to the right, leading into the kitchen, now opened. A woman entered, with her knitting in her hand. This one already here took no notice of her beyond a glance. She quietly seated herself on a stool beside the fire, a little to one side, where the shadow of the broad chimney-jamb fell upon her. She always kept in shadow when this other one was by. So similar was she in age and features to the one who now eyed her in the full light that they might well have passed as sisters. But in form they differed—this one being small and lightsome, more like the other's child. And there was a subdued expression of sadness about her face that the other's did not bear.

Several moments passed in silence, the frowning face still bent upon the fire, the sad face leaning over the needles, as if, with the thread, she were weaving the story of some fresh and heavy sorrow. Now and then a tear dropped upon the fabric, but not unseen by the woman, whose eyes had left the fire, and were now upon her companion.

"Are you crying, Aziel?" she asked, in a voice that was soft and clear, but without a trace of emotion in its rich, even tones. "I do not see why you should cry. It is not *your* husband who insults you every day—not *your* son who, bitterly upbraiding you and accusing you falsely, has cast aside your love for that of a low and artful girl!"

The woman thus addressed half started from the shadow, and looked up with a sudden expression of pain and beseeching on her face. She was about to speak, and give full vent to her feelings; but something kept her back, and, resuming her knitting with a sigh, she was again in the shadow. "I know what you were going to say," went on the other, with just a trifle of contempt creeping into her voice, but as instantly dismissing it, and coming back to her mellow tones. "You were going to take his part instead of mine, as you have steadily done from the very first day you held him, a baby, in your arms. If letting him have his own way through all his childhood—minis-

tering to every boyish fancy, and siding with him in all the follies of his youth—he love, you, Aziel, have loved him more than his mother.”

The knitter by the fire bent farther over her work. More rapidly the needles sped in and out of the knitting. Her face paled and flushed, her heart beat fast and slow, and a tremor ran through the busy hands, dropping stitches now, instead of making them. She moved deeper into the shadow. Was it to avoid the heat of the fire? or did she feel safer the farther away from the eyes she felt were upon her?—eyes that yet might detect her secret, even though she drooped her head and sat in the shadow.

“Do not think I am so unkind as to blame you for loving the boy as you have done,” resumed the other; “but now, when he would cast his mother off, although he knows he is her only comfort and joy, it is not right that you should take his part. It is neither best for him that you should do so, nor kind to me. And no one knows it better than you do, Aziel, for you are lacking in neither good judgment nor strong affection. Do not cry. I am not intentionally hurting your feelings. You have been too faithful to me and him, through all these many years, for me to wish to do that. But I had a right to expect that you would join me in opposition to this last silly freak of his. Why, just for one moment think of the absurdity of the project! A youth—for he is nothing else—marrying a child—for she is nothing more; and the two going alone to a great city to make their fortune—a city where they may starve and die before their neighbors care to find out their names. Indeed, if it were not my son who proposes to do so foolish an act, I could laugh at its ridiculous folly; and yet, Aziel, you can see him intent on such a wild plan, and utter no protest. On the contrary, you tell him, as I heard you to-day, that you were sure he was on the road to fame and fortune. Better that he had died of neglect, when a babe in your arms, than that you should help him to turn against his mother and encourage him to his ruin.”

The woman in the shadow, though greatly agitated by these words, did not stop her knitting; but before the

other's voice had ceased she was already replying, pouring out her thoughts in a torrent of passionate eloquence, burning on the cheek and flashing from the eye.

"You accuse me wrongfully," she said, for an instant, and only for an instant, raising her eyes. "I have not sided with the boy against you—I love you both too much for that. I cannot stop his loving the girl. Heaven knows I wish he had never seen her! I cannot prevent his going away from us. If I could, he never should leave your sight or mine. What will this house be without him? I dread to think of it! Yet he will go. You know how determined he is, and how hopeful and ambitious; and what is there about the life of this farm to attract him? He is far too good for it. I cannot blame him for wanting to leave it. We cannot expect to always have him with us. He is a man now, and another love than that of nurse and mother has taken possession of him. If he must and will go from us, I say let him go with our blessing and love. It's little else he can carry with him from this place, except the contempt and hatred of his stepfather. And, if he loves the girl, why should he not marry her? She may be the very woman to save his earnings, make his heart glad with her confidence, and encourage him when all else in the world fails him. She may be poor, but she is beautiful. You would say so, if you had caught a glimpse of her as I did yesterday; and you could not look into her face and not see goodness written all over it. Whatever the great city has in store for them, we must, at all events, let them leave us with our blessing. You would not refuse them that? When he told me he should positively go in a few days, could I say less to him than that I believed he would be successful, though all the time my heart was full of misgivings and fears? Would you have had me deny him the good opinion of his nurse—my best wishes and hopes? Surely it was little enough for me to give him."

Here her voice died out as suddenly as she had begun, and, intent upon her work, she bent over it in silence, and her tears fell in the shadow. The other made no answer, but as she listened the frown had slowly died out of her face. A calm look came upon it—a calmness of control

rather than that of resignation, though now her words were such.

"You are right, Aziel," she said, leaning her head upon her hand, and gazing into the fire with an abstracted air, such as one has when memory is busy with the thoughts. "You have spoken well for him—you should have been his mother, not I. You ought to have suffered and sacrificed all I have for him these long, weary years—years that began even before his birth. You know something of it, Aziel, but not all—not all—although you have been my only companion, my only friend, and must have seen and heard much. There was more I could not tell you, for very shame, even in my most confidential moods. And what is now the end of it all? Nothing but disappointment, and disappointment so bitter and grievous that I could not bear it, had not all these years prepared me even for this."

"I know it is hard, very hard, for you to have him go away," rejoined the other, after a long pause, as if she were weighing what it were best to say; "but is it not better for him that he should go? You know how he dislikes the farm and everything about it. You see the hatred between him and his stepfather increasing every day, until I fear sometimes it will come to blows, or something worse, when he hears his mother spoken to as you were to-day. Besides, there is no opportunity in this village for him to make his talents available. What mill is there here, where he could work over the machinery, and get out his inventions and patents, as I am sure he will when he has a chance? No, Slowville is no place for a genius like his; but in a city he could make fame and fortune, and I know you would be only too glad for him to have both."

"So I would; but not if to get them he must leave his mother here. Do I not hate the place, and all its surroundings, as much as he does? Would I have ever come here, had it not been for his sake? Was it for a home for myself, or for him, that I married this man? You know," with a trifle of bitterness about the lips, "why I am here, and why you urged my coming here as this man's wife; and now, when the boy is old enough to begin to pay me

back in love and devotion for my trials and sacrifices, what does he do? Hark! was that a footstep outside?" Then, glancing at the clock: "It cannot be either of them—it is only a little past nine, and the Lyceum does not close till ten."

They listened intently, turning toward the door. Yes, there were footsteps outside—soft ones—not on the gravelled walk, but stealing along on the deadening sod under the windows. They waited to hear a knock upon the door, but no knock came, and now the footsteps had ceased, and whoever it was he seemed to have passed on. The questioning glances of the women met. In the face of the one in the chair was no fear, but on the face of the other, by the chimney, there came a blanched look—a look it always wore whenever a stranger came to the house. The woman in the chair arose, and, taking the candle in her hand, went to the door.

"Do not open the door," whispered Aziel, her fears finding utterance in fresh alarm at the movement of her companion. "Remember, we are alone."

"And for that very reason it is better that, whoever this tramp may be, he should see we are not afraid of him. If you are afraid, go lock yourself in your room; I shall see who it is."

With these words she opened the door, and threw it wide, holding the candle above her head. Its faint beams penetrated the darkness for an instant, and then, revealing nothing, went out in a gust of wind. But still resolved upon her search, the woman stepped out upon the doorstep, and peered about her. At first she saw nothing, but as her eyes began to accommodate themselves to the gloom, she thought she detected the form of a man standing beside a lilac bush, close to the farther window.

"Who is there?" she asked, in a voice as dauntless as it was commanding. "You need not try to hide yourself. I see you plainly. What do you want?"

At these words the man quickly emerged from his concealment and came forward.

"I wish to see Mrs. Silas Gagger," he said, with a voice that was feigned, "and, if I mistake not, this is the lady."

"Who are you?" she asked, her voice hollow, as she shrank back from him into the doorway.

And then, as if she had lost power of further motion, she stood looking at him, with parted lips, and eyes that glared with terror as his face drew nearer. He stepped upon the sill and stood in front of her. The light of the fire fell upon his face and illumined his features. His wicked eyes glowed up at her with a mocking smile. That look, that smile!—they belonged but to one man, were he living or dead. She uttered a cry of recognition and dismay, and would have fallen had he not caught her. But as she felt his arms about her, she quickly came back to herself. She struggled out of his grasp, flung aside his arms, and confronted him as of old, with a look of fierce defiance.

"Mrs. Silas Gagger has not changed, I see, since she was Mrs. Seth Slade. Nor have I," he said, with a laugh, pulling off his beard, and letting a gleam of triumph play over his shaven cheeks, a moustache and goatee still concealing his taunting mouth and firm, projecting chin.

CHAPTER V.

NEVER SO UNWELCOME.

WHEN she first heard the man's voice, the woman by the fireplace had been so overcome—for she instantly recognized it—that she was paralyzed with terror. She could not move, though she strove to rise and make her escape. Like a statue she sat there, her eyes fixed with a wide stare upon the door, her work poised in her motionless hands. But when the man entered the room and spoke again, she was startled into action. Dropping her work, she pressed her hands upon her mouth, lest it might speak and betray her, and shrank deeper into the shadow, forcing herself down into the corner behind the jamb. Crouched there like some hunted creature, she still kept her eyes upon the figure at the door. How loudly her heart beat now! It seemed as if it would bound from her bosom. And yet, where was all the blood going?

Certainly not into her veins, for she was shivering with cold in every limb, until she felt herself growing rigid as ice.

In the mean time, the man and woman near the door had been silently eying each other, she with that fearless and defiant look, he with the hard and cruel smile, as his eyes, slowly surveying her from head to foot, came to a rest again upon her face.

"Well," he said, at length, breaking out into an indifferent laugh, "this is not a warm welcome, to say the least. But men must not expect to come back from their graves and find their wives as they left them. So this is Mrs. Silas Gagger? Mrs. Gagger"—approaching her and extending his hand—"allow me to congratulate you. I wish you happiness."

She hesitated a moment. Should she try to conciliate him? No; he was not the man for that. She retreated from him a pace, then proudly drawing her form to its fullest height, she looked upon him, her eyes glowing with a stronger light, the thin, quivering nostrils dilating, and the parted lips curling with contempt as they slightly disclosed the white tracery of her teeth.

"So," with a nonchalant toss of his hand, "you will not shake hands with me? Well, perhaps you will speak to me. After a seven years' absence you ought at least to inquire after my health. Common politeness requires that much. Of course I do not expect you to congratulate me on my escape from shipwreck—that would be asking too much of your widowed love. And just now I see you are wishing me with all your heart at the bottom of the Pacific."

"Rather than you should be here, I would willingly myself lie at the bottom of the ocean." She spoke at last, but not in a broken or agitated voice.

There was a firmness in her tone that accorded well with her determined bearing toward him.

"Oh, I comprehend you now. I see you are afraid of my intentions," with a tantalizing smile. "You think that I have come back to take you from the arms of your second love. I don't look much like a second Enoch Arden, do I? Now suppose, for the sake of argument

—and you were always good at argument, Mrs. Gagger, though slightly dogmatic, if I remember rightly—suppose that I have come back to claim my dear wife of former days, what have you to say against such a loving action on my part? Certainly it would be an evidence of my undying affection.”

“Thank Heaven I am not, in that respect at least, in the power of your affection or your hate!” she replied, looking steadily at him, an air of triumph in voice and feature. “You can come here and break up my home, and thus add to my many obligations to you; but, strive with all your wicked and malicious heart, you cannot make me your wife. That much of evil is not in your power.”

“Well, perhaps not; but for the present we will not argue the question. Come, let us sit down and talk over old times. That fireplace looks very inviting. It needs a little more wood now. If you sit in front of it a while, it may thaw you out.”

So saying, he picked the candle up from the floor, where it had fallen, and, replacing it in the stick, struck a light. Then he threw aside his hat and light overcoat with the careless ease of years ago, and, taking up a chair, drew it over to the fireplace, beckoning her to follow. She did not do so, but stood where she was, resolved not to yield in the slightest to him until she had found out the reason for his coming; then she would decide how further to treat him. He had placed the chair beside the table where he was standing, and was putting the candle on the mantel-shelf, when his eyes fell upon the figure crouching in its hiding-place near his feet.

“Hello!” he exclaimed, bending over the woman, whose white face was now turned up to him in an agony of dread. “Bless my soul! this is Azriel Loyd! Why, Azriel, what makes you look so frightened? You should take lessons from your mistress. Upon my word I am delighted to see you!”

And, despite her struggles to evade him, he seized her hands; then, drawing her from her hiding-place, he caught her in his arms and raised her to her feet—evidently pleased at her resistance, for he laughed—holding her out at arm’s

length. She broke away from him with a fierce cry, covering her face with her hands ; then, standing for an instant irresolute whether to flee the house or remain, she ran across the room, and sought refuge beside her mistress, where she gave way to a flood of nervous tears.

"Well !" he exclaimed, raising his hands with a gesture of mock surprise, "my welcome gets worse instead of better. The wife of my bosom despises me, and the nurse of my only son refuses me even so little as a look of greeting !"

He turned his back upon them, and began to pile wood upon the fire, until the chimney roared with the mighty flame, and the light filled the room with the brightness of day. Then, leisurely seating himself where he had a full view of his companions, he lay back in his chair, and laughed heartily.

"I declare," he went on, between his bursts of hilarity, "you two women haven't changed a bit since I saw you last. Both plump and saucy. You have evidently been feeding on the fat of the land during my absence. Yes, these are comfortable quarters, I must admit," glancing around the room with an air of appreciation. "I suppose you have a spare room for me to-night ? Ah, ladies, still inhospitable ? no invitation to remain ?" he resumed, after he had waited for a reply and received none. "Then I must wait until the gentlemen return. They may be more civil when they find out who I am. My wife's husband and my dear son will be glad to see me, I am sure."

He wheeled himself about in his chair, and took a newspaper from the table, which he now pretended to be reading very intently. But his eyes, hidden beneath the ambuscade of his drawn brows, were askance upon his companions, while his ears were strained to catch the slightest whisper that might pass between them.

Several moments went by in dead silence, save the stifled sobs that came from Aziel. She seemed to have lost as much control of herself as the other still possessed. And this continued exhibition of alarm and grief, which her mistress had been unable to subdue by meaning look or authoritative gesture, now called for more summary treatment.

"Go to your room," said her companion, in a voice of

mild command, leading her to the door. "There is no reason why you should show such fear. His return cannot affect you. Besides, it is better that we should be alone." She opened the door, and pushed her gently forward into the entry.

Aziel found her tongue now. She caught the other's hand in a quick, nervous pressure, and said, in a voice so anxious she could scarcely repress it to a whisper: "You will not be rash? You will remember the boy? You will do anything for his sake?"

A flash of impatient indignation came across the face of the mistress. Could this nurse never think of any one but the boy? Was he the only one in all this trouble whose welfare must be consulted? Was his mother to endure every misery and degradation that he might be free from annoyance—free to go away and leave her to bear her burdens alone?

Without replying, she closed the door upon the pleading, scared face, and came back into the room, her countenance again singularly calm despite the contending emotions in her breast. And now, with a firm step, she slowly crossed the floor and stood beside the reader, a little in advance of him, where, should he raise his eyes, they could look full into her face. He kept on reading as if she were a thousand miles away and he the sole and comfortable occupant of the apartment.

"Seth Slade"—she spoke his name with the slightest tremor—"why have you come here? What do you intend to do?"

He slowly glanced up at her, and returned her steady gaze with a derisive smile; then, with a light laugh, he tossed the paper aside, and motioned her to a seat opposite him, by the table.

"Come sit down, Annie—Mrs. Gagger, I mean!" with a mocking apologetic wave of his hand. "Fact is, I cannot forget our old relation to each other. So you have at last taken enough interest in your dear departed to ask him his intentions. Why have I come here? and what do I intend to do? Two short questions, but very comprehensive. But I remember you always were both precise and comprehensive in your way of speaking!"

She had seated herself, and, with an elbow leaning carelessly upon the table, she had assumed an attitude of indifferent attention, although her eyes never for an instant left his face, quietly yet intently scanning every feature as he spoke. His words had too often deceived her. She must in his face now, if possible, read the secret of his coming here to-night.

"You are trying to study me out, I see," he said, stroking his moustache with his long white hand, upon the forefinger of which shone the ring which Dibbs, of the Green Tree, had so much admired—the coiled serpent with ruby eyes. "Now," with a malicious twinkle, "you would be delighted to hear me say, 'My dear wife of a short while ago, I have merely called here to-night to assure myself that you are at last happy; that in the love of your second husband you find that joy of affection, that wealth of love, that peace of mind, which were denied you in your first wedded life; and, having seen you thus happy, I am going away for ever, and you will never see or hear of me again, any more than if I were really stretched at full length on the bottom of the Pacific.' That is what you would like to hear me say, isn't it?"

"You did not come here to say anything like that," she rejoined, a trifle of contempt in her voice. "Your errand is far different, and whatever it is, you had better state it without further delay," glancing at the clock, "unless you want other witnesses of our meeting. And I am sure you do not, or you would not have come here so secretly, and at this hour."

"Sharp as ever," he said, in a bantering tone, "and correct, as usual. Yes, we had better settle our business by ourselves; and, as long as you do not object to a little secrecy in the matter, it is better for us both. So we will proceed to business. You have married a rich man, I hear?"

"Well, what of that? I have seen very little of his money. And if you have come here for money, you will certainly go away without it," was her ready and resolute answer.

"Indeed!" elevating his eyebrows, and staring at her in feigned disappointment. "Then there is not much

chance for me to turn an honest penny. You have no money to purchase my silence, and he will probably spare none to buy my title to you as my wife."

"That title is no longer good. The law destroyed it years ago. You can never recover it;" and, more vehemently: "Thank Heaven that this once, at least, the law is on the side of the weaker party. I was your wife and slave seven years ago, but I am neither now—"

"Are you quite sure of that?" he interrupted, as blandly as if he were preserving the amenities of polite conversation, and did not wish to flatly contradict her. "The law, as I have read it, states the present case very positively in my favor. Ah, here it is!" taking from his pocket-book a sheet of letter paper, which he slowly opened, the cunning of his smile deepening. "Shall I read you this paragraph, which I recently copied verbatim from the laws of Pennsylvania on the subject of divorce?"

"It makes no difference to me what you read. I know my present position is perfectly lawful. You were absent two years; and, besides, you were reported drowned by shipwreck. These two circumstances gave me the legal right to marry again."

"Certainly you are correct, my dear madam, as far as you have stated the general law; but every law has its miscellaneous provisions, as the lawyers call them, which to my mind are, like the postscript to a lady's letter, the most important part of the whole document. Listen a moment, and you will agree with me, I think."

Then, taking the candle, he held it close to the paper, and read, in an unmoved and deliberate voice, the following:

"If any husband or wife, upon any false rumor, in appearance well founded, of the death of the other (when such other has been absent for the space of two whole years), hath married, or shall marry again, he or she shall not be liable to the pains of adultery."

"That, I take it," lowering the paper and looking at her intently, "is your view of the case. Before you married again, there had been a well-founded rumor of my death, and I had also been absent for the space of two years. Am I right? Did you marry under those conditions?"

"I did," she stoutly rejoined. "I read your name among the lost in a paper, which was sent me from London, giving an account of the shipwreck. And as to your absence, you know it is fully seven years this very month since I last saw you."

"I hope the narrative of the shipwreck was very interesting to you. It must have been quite a pleasure to read my name among the lost. I thought it would be, when I got a friend to mail you the paper." This he said with his face struggling between a frown and a leer.

"You, then, concocted the lie, and sent me the paper containing it!" She spoke slowly, turning away from his tantalizing gaze. "What a fool I was, not to have suspected it!"

"Certainly, my dear; and I never should have sent you such sad news, had I any idea you would marry again and bring yourself into trouble in the eyes of the law. However, we cannot change the facts, nor the law either. Now for my side of the case in hand; and what it is best to do, I will leave you to decide."

He went on reading, with a stronger stress of emphasis:

"But it shall be in the election of the party remaining unmarried, at his or her return, to insist to have his or her former wife or husband restored, or to have his or her own marriage dissolved and the other party to remain with the second husband or wife; and in any suit or action, instituted for this purpose within six months after such return, the Court may and shall sentence and decree accordingly."

"There, my dear madam," replacing the paper in his pocket, and setting the candle on the mantel and turning to her; "you have heard the law, which, as I have read it, you can verify at any lawyer's office. By the law you see that, if I choose, I can have my former wife restored to me. So it depends solely on my choice and will whether Mrs. Gagger remains as she is, or again becomes Mrs. Seth Slade."

An ashen pallor was spreading over lip, and brow, and cheek; a dead look was creeping into her eyes, and she threw out her hands with a groping gesture. He stopped suddenly. He sprang toward her, just in time to catch her head as it fell forward heavily upon the table. He

turned her face upward and spoke to her, his tones, for the moment, in softened command. But no reply came from the livid parted lips. He leaned closer to her face, and her low, soft breath touched his cheek. Then he knew she had only swooned away.

At this moment he heard a door open. He looked up, and Aziel stood on the threshold, one hand to her frightened face, the other clasped upon her heart, which, like the one in the chair, seemed to have stopped its beating.

"Come here," he said, beckoning to her. "I must be going now. She has only fainted. When she comes to, tell her I will be back a week from to-night, if I can do so with secrecy; and I will look out for that."

So saying, he replaced his beard, caught up his coat and hat, and disappeared through the outer door.

CHAPTER VI.

TOUCHING A TENDER SPOT.

SILAS GAGGER was the complete personification ofegotism, self-conceit and vanity. The perfections of his character were the constant theme of his contemplation; his opinions on every subject were alone correct; and no one could pay him sufficient attention, or his opinions too much respect. Yet, notwithstanding all these qualities, of which he prided himself the sole possessor, the people of Slowville neither respected him nor agreed in the slightest with his opinions. They looked upon him as a proud, selfish, irritable and disagreeable old fellow. His opinions they always greeted with ready opposition, and more frequently with laughs of derision, as he endeavored to give them greater weight and enforce their acceptance by violence of language and manner. Such was the man who, with his hat on his head, had risen, that evening, in his seat in the Lyceum, and, despite the loud calls to order, was insisting on being allowed to take part in the discussion.

"The gentleman is not in order," said the President. "Not being a member, he is not entitled to the floor without unanimous consent. He will please be seated."

Silas Gagger did not take his seat. On the contrary, he shook his fist defiantly at the President, and then turned glaringly upon the audience, whose boisterousness increased every moment. "These are the days of free speech!" he cried. "No one, be he man, devil, or angel, shall stop my voice! This is the Town Hall; I pay my taxes, and have right to use it—" Beyond this his words became inaudible, amid the riot of sound that swept over the room.

Silas Gagger's eyes flashed fire, the red heat of indignation crimsoned his cheeks, and brows, and temples, making his long white beard seven-fold whiter by contrast. He shook his clenched fists at those around him, and with gesticulations more violent, yelled defiance at the top of his voice. The storm of opposition to him only increased; the more he roared, and stamped, and swore—and he was doing all three now—the louder became the uproar, until the very floor and walls seemed to be vibrating with the commotion. But just now, when those in his immediate vicinity began to look out for some violence at his hands, and were preparing to eject him on the first show of it, he suddenly ceased. Then, without so much as a parting glance at the assembly, he walked leisurely out of the room. "Just like him!" exclaimed several. "Always doing the opposite of what you expect."

Descending the stairs with a smile of contempt—what a contempt he always had for those who were afraid to hear the truth, the truth as he alone could reveal it to them!—he sought out his vehicle and started homeward. He was master there, and this thought gave him great satisfaction in the midst of his anger at the way in which he had been served by the members of the Lyceum. For while to men generally there comes the consoling thought, in the midst of their worldly rebuffs and disappointments, that at home there are those who love and prize them, to this man there was a much sweeter delight in feeling that at his home were those who dared not question his opinions or oppose his will. Why should they? What was

woman's judgment compared with a man's knowledge? her disconnected and fanciful ideas, contrasted with his clear and comprehensive opinions which stood the test of logic and experience as well? When opposite the Green Tree, the thought suddenly came to him that a whiskey-toddy would settle his nerves and tone down his feelings. Other men drink for the excitement it produces. His nature was in noble contrast to the common herd; he drank for the calmness it brought to him. Reining in his horse so suddenly that he almost pitched himself over the dasher, he gave the beast a sharp cut for her promptness, and then alighted. Hitching the animal with a rope he took from beneath the seat—he despised straps—he turned and entered the tavern.

Dibbs was still alone, curled up in his chair behind the bar, and as usual indulging in one of his numerous cat-naps, which the entrance of the man did not disturb. Certainly, if the innocence of Dibbs' heart could be judged by the soundness of his sleep, he was as innocent as a babe.

"Wake up! wake up there, you lazy lubber!" shouted Gagger, walking over to the bar and giving it a ringing blow in very close proximity to where Dibbs' head was resting.

Dibbs had heard the first word the man spoke, but he was so used to being awakened by the loud calls of customers that he was not startled by the sound into any sudden movement. In fact, though wide awake, he did not move at all, neither did he open his eyes; for in this case, having recognized the voice, he instantly determined to make it no easy task for this one to wake him. He hated the man so much that even this small way of annoying him was a great pleasure to Dibbs, who would rather play a joke than eat his dinner. But when Silas Gagger's hand came down with such a rousing smack so near his ears, Dibbs changed his tactics. He flung out his arm quickly, as he sprang with a frightened air to his feet; and strange to say the arm struck the large earthen pitcher on the bar such a well-directed blow that it was overturned, and its ice-cold contents deluged the old man from his waist to his feet, saturating his clothes to the skin, while the

pitcher itself broke into fragments upon his most tender bunion.

"Fool!" roared Gagger, dancing around on one foot, and shivering with this bath of ice-water. "See what you have done! I have a good mind to thrash you!" shaking a formidable-looking horse-whip at him.

"I beg your pardon! Indeed, Mr. Gagger, you must excuse me," said Dibbs, catching up a towel and proceeding to rub down the old man very much as if he had been a horse. "It was an accident, I assure you. You scared the wits out of me, striking the counter that way, so close to my ears. But just be quiet a minute; you will soon be dry." Dibbs went on rubbing him down, laying on his towel with such innocent vigor that the old man cried out, giving him a push that sent his head with a loud bump against the bar, "Get out, you born idiot! Don't you see you are rubbing the skin off my legs?"

Dibbs rose slowly to his feet, muttering something about doing the best he could, and with an apparently crestfallen air, went behind the bar. Here he stood, with a capitably drawn face, silently watching his companion, who had placed himself in front of the stove to complete the drying and stop his shivering. But while Dibbs stood there looking so demure, his brain was very busy plotting further mischief, for which the present opportunity was so favorable. He knew Silas Gagger was very jealous of his wife, and Dibbs was now chuckling over the rare chance to fan that jealousy into a violent flame by relating, in as suspicious a way as possible, the conversation which had taken place that evening between himself and the mysterious stranger. Not that Dibbs had the slightest idea the stranger was in any way related to or concerned with any of the inmates of the Gagger farmhouse.

* He only saw in the whole affair a rare opportunity to make this man here red-hot with jealousy, as he mentally expressed the result. And now he was ready to distill the poison, and he did it in this way:

"Mr. Gagger," he said, "you had better let me mix you a hot drink, as I did for a strange gentleman about

an hour ago. If it warms you up as it did him, you will be very soon dry inside and out."

"You tend to your business, and I will tend to mine," was the gruff answer, the old man holding his wet clothes closer to the stove, until a little cloud of steam rose from them, and the intense heat began to blister his shivering shanks. "A pretty mess you have made of it!" he roared, jumping about and holding out his hot trowsers legs as far as they would stretch. "First you froze me, now you want to parboil me. Dibbs," cursing him roundly, "you are a born fool!"

"Well, I am not to blame for that," said Dibbs, with an apologetic shrug of his shoulders. "There are more fools born than wise men, so the chances were in my favor, yet in wise men we often find more folly than wisdom. But grant that I am a fool, I was wise enough to form an opinion of the mysterious fellow who was here a little while ago. By the way," went on Dibbs, approaching him very confidentially, and looking suspiciously about the room, while he whispered ominously in the old man's ear, "you didn't see anything of him over at the Lyceum, did you—a tall man, with a black beard, and a long coat, and a felt hat, and eyes small like yours, only they were black?"

"No, I didn't; but why do you ask? What's the man to me?" Then, as he caught the peculiar expression of the other's face, he asked, with a sudden show of interest: "What are you concealing, boy? Who was the man? Do I know him?"

"No," replied Dibbs, his mysterious manner deepening, "you don't know *him*, but he appeared to know *you*, and I *guess*," with provoking emphasis, and laying his forefinger significantly on the side of his nose, while his left eye disappeared in a knowing wink, "he knows more about the ladies up at your house—"

The old man sprang at him with an oath, caught him by the collar with a savage grip, and, raising his whip, brought it with a vigorous blow down upon Dibbs' shoulders.

"How dare you, you scoundrel, talk and look that way about my wife!" thundered Gagger, shaking him and

rapidly plying the whip, while Dibbs vainly endeavored to dodge the blows and wriggle out of his iron grasp.

At last he was successful, and he jumped for refuge behind the bar, where he caught up a bottle and stood on the defensive.

"I have a mind to thrash you again," said Gagger, puffing with his recent exertions, and shaking the whip at him.

"Oh yes," replied Dibbs, in a doleful voice, as he put the bottle down and began to rub his shoulders with every evidence of great pain, "this is always the thanks a fellow gets for trying to do a fellow-man a good turn. Take me for a noodle if I don't keep my own secrets after this. Mysterious fellows, thick as blackberries, may come around Slowville, and I will hold my tongue, no matter if I do find out there is something wrong about them."

The old man, his passion having somewhat subsided, had been striding up and down the room during this soliloquy of Dibbs. He was not listening to a word of it, but was now debating with himself whether, perhaps, there was not some mystery here it was worth his while to fathom. A strange man in Slowville, who knew, or pretended to know, all about him and his family! Who could he be? He had no living relatives except a nephew, who was well known in Slowville. His wife had none beyond her son, nor had Aziel Loyd, their servant—at least, not to his knowledge. These and kindred thoughts, which coursed rapidly through his brain, roused Silas Gagger's curiosity, which as quickly changed into suspicion, and then leaped into jealousy with this sudden thought—suppose this man were some old lover of his wife!

He broke off in this train of thought, suddenly turned to Dibbs, and asked: "Did this man say where he was going when he left you?"

"Yes; but he went to neither place. You did not see him at the Lyceum, and Jack, the clerk at Grimes', was in here just before you came, and said he had not been at the store. And he told me he was going to both places."

"Where do you suppose he did go?" asked the old man, after a long pause, during which Dibbs was executing a lively whistle.

"That's for you to find out, not I," rejoined Dibbs, resuming his tune, and then dryly remarking: "I have my suspicions and you have your whip, and the one may be as bad as the other. But if you keep your eyes open on the way home, you may see him."

"Dibbs!"

The old man turned on him threateningly, but as quickly recovered himself, as he saw the innocent look on the young man's face. Then, without another word, he buttoned up his coat, grasped his whip firmly in his hand, and muttering vengeance, hurried out of the house.

A second later, Dibbs laughed with glee as he heard the dilapidated old chaise dash madly down the street.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.

WHETHER it were the clearer atmosphere which had come with the departure of the man, or the loud calls and vigorous shaking of Aziel, or the sound of wheels clattering up the hill, that startled the life-currents into sudden activity, the woman came back to consciousness very fast. She raised her head, flung out her hands with a quick gesture, as if warding off something, opened her eyes as widely as if she had just come out of a hideous nightmare, and then as rapidly turned her questioning and still white face on her companion.

"Has he gone?" she asked, casting a shivering, scared look about the room; then, as she caught the sound of carriage-wheels, which were almost at the door, she exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper, as she sank back in her chair, "Hark! there comes the other. What if they have met? What shall we do?"

The vehicle rattled past the door, and went on toward the barn. There was still time left to adopt some plan that would deceive the man so soon to appear, if deceived he could be. Aziel was the first to devise that plan, and she put it into instant execution. She, who, but a few mo-

ments ago, had been cowering with abject fear in the presence of Seth Slade, was now strangely confident and self-possessed.

"Go to your room; keep a stout heart, and leave me to manage him," she said, with the air of one fully able to cope with the situation. "I will make a good excuse for your absence, and find out all he knows."

"But suppose he saw him leaving the house? He has only been gone a few moments."

"Seth Slade is not the man to let any one that he chooses to hide from see him," replied Aziel, with a reassuring shake of her head. "And even if he was seen, has not my brother a right to come and see me?—my brother who has just returned from California?"

"Your brother? I do not understand," said the other, with a puzzled look, as if the words just spoken might have been in earnest or jest, she knew not which.

"Of course you do not understand just now, you poor dear!" putting her arm around her, and helping her to her feet. "But come! go to your room, and calm yourself. You will be strong again in a little while. In the mean time, I will take good care that, if he has seen the man, he will trouble you with no questions you cannot answer. I will take care that you know all that has passed between us before he comes to bed. But remember that the man who came here to-night, if he has been seen leaving this house, is my brother. There, now! don't stop to argue with me!" gently urging her toward the door. "There is little time left me to get ready for him."

The woman, with a grateful glance, pressed the other's hand, and went slowly up the stairs, trembling with the faint hope that what had happened this night might yet be concealed. And if concealed to-night, why not for ever hidden? It was not impossible. There must be some way in which it could be done.

Her heart beat a trifle more freely at this thought. And as it fast took on a more defined form of certainty, she felt herself growing stronger in body, less fearful in heart. She stopped on the landing, her step a firm one now. She would listen to what might transpire below. She was no longer afraid. She dared to hear all. Looking down, she saw,

by the long, dim streak of light, that the door was ajar, and she heard Aziel singing and bustling about the room, busying herself, as if in all the world there were no happier maid-of-all-work. Yet, notwithstanding her apparent hilarious activity, she was doing nothing that was not suggested by her mean opinion of her master—his closeness and his cunning. She would be more than a match for him to-night, she thought, a wary smile on her face, as she passed to and fro from kitchen to sitting-room, her hands and feet no more active than her scheming brain, framing ready answers for suspicion's closest questions.

All was at last ready for his coming. A small fire was on the hearth. Two sticks alone sent up their economical blaze, while the large pile of ashes made during the generous combustion of the evening had disappeared, through Aziel's agency, into the wood-shed. He was so saving of wood, she would spare him the sad sight of so much ashes. Thoughtful Aziel! On the little table, beside which she now sat with her knitting in her hand, were preparations just as thoughtful—perhaps as innocent—as the hiding of the ashes. There were the bottle and the big tumbler, with its ample spoon, and the lemon and the sugar, and on the crane swung the kettle, giving out its gentle breath of steam. Here was placed his large arm-chair, with its generous seat, its high back, and long arms, where one's elbows could rest with ease and safety. Over it was flung his thick woolen wrapper, while on the floor, in front, were his slippers, inviting to ease. Surely if he could be won by thoughtfulness of his comfort, these preparations ought to have made him pleasant to this one sitting here, upon whose anxious ears now fell his sturdy footsteps.

Another moment and she should be in his presence! She nerved herself for the encounter which she felt would prove her courage and her shrewdness, and, with a stony calmness on her features, she faced the door. An instant later, a wringing grasp, as if some grudge was owed it, rattled the brass knob. The door was pushed violently open with a bang that threatened its hinges as it crashed against the wall. Then the man came in, flinging the door back again with a force that shook the house like the

blow of a giant, and brought down a piece of plaster from the broken ceiling. It fell at his feet. He kicked it aside, scattering the remnants over the floor, and advanced farther into the room. Now halting, he stood glaring at the woman, who had risen to force a hearty welcome to her lips. But she quailed beneath the fierceness of his look. What had he seen? What did he know?

A strange and grotesque figure he was, standing there, his tall and angular form trembling with some pent-up passion. A long brownish-white beard straggled down over his coat, while his coat, buttoned up, with its very short waist and very long skirt, straggled down his legs, to meet the bottom of his pants, which had straggled up from his shoe-tops. An old white hat, with a napless fur and broad brim, was thrust far upon his head, from which streamed ample locks of hair, like the beard both in color and length, for it fell full down on his shoulders. Nothing of his face was visible, save a faint line of his forehead beneath which jutted two heavy brows. These bristled above eyes that were very small, yet piercing as two concentrated rays of light. A long, thin nose, projecting cheek bones, and temples slightly sunken, completed his visible features. So unamiable were they all that no one would care to know what further unprepossessing ones lay hidden beneath his beard.

"What are you staring at me for?" he demanded. "Where's your mistress? Who told her she might go to bed before I came home?"

"She had a very bad headache, and could not sit up any longer. But see, Mr. Gagger," pointing to the chair and table, "I have got everything ready for you. I thought I would give you a little surprise to-night, and have things at your hand before you asked for them. Here are the materials for the punch, and here are—"

"To the devil with your punch! Who told you I wanted punch to-night?"

"I thought you would drink it to-night the same as any other night," she answered, very quietly, determined not to be thrown off her guard, lest she should fail in the weightier questions yet to come.

"Well, you thought wrong," he rejoined, with a sneer, hanging up his outer coat and hat as carefully as if they were just new and of the latest fashion. "Look here, Aziel," he continued, turning to her again, "I want you to understand I am master in this house, and I won't take anybody's suggestions. When I want punch, I will say so, and until I say I want it don't you dare to again suggest it."

"I am sure I meant no disrespect. The things can be easily put away," and she prepared to gather them up.

"Let them alone! Who told you to put them away? See here," tossing the wrapper on the floor, kicking the slippers across the room, and slowly seating himself, "sit down in that chair, and look me full in the face. I am going to ask you a question, and mind you answer it truthfully. Who was that man I saw skulking out of our lane as I came driving home? I called to him and he ran. Had I had a pistol, I warrant you he would have stopped in a hurry."

"Why," bringing her hands together with a little gush of joy, "that was my brother! I was going to tell you all about him, but you were so angry at my getting your punch ready that you gave me no chance—"

"Stop lying, and speak the truth, even if you are a woman!" he interrupted, putting out his hand with an impatient gesture of disgust. "That man was not your brother. His coming here this time of night, during my absence, and leaving just before my return, prove it. Besides, you always told me you had no relatives living."

"So I did," broke in Aziel, covering her face with her apron and beginning to cry. "He went to California years ago, and I thought he was dead. It's not my fault he's alive, and I can't help it if he is fleeing from the law, and has to come and see his sister in secret."

"Humph! that is well put; but I don't believe a word of it," bringing down his palm with a smart blow on the table. "You can't deceive me! Those tears are pumped too near your eyes. Lying and crying go together with women and children."

"It is the truth I am telling you," sobbed the woman, more violently rocking herself to and fro, and gathering

the apron in deeper folds about her face. "You can ask your wife. She heard the story, how detectives were on his track for robbing a bank in San Francisco, when he had nothing to do with it. Poor fellow, he's safe now, thank Heaven! With the money I gave him, he can put the ocean between him and them before to-morrow night."

"You can stop now," striking the table with his clenched fist. "You have lied enough to blister any honest tongue! I am more certain now than when you began that the man is not your brother. Yet"—slowly changing his voice to an indifferent tone, lest it might give the slightest betrayal of the suspicion that had just flashed across his mind and made his heart leap with a malicious joy—"perhaps I am too hard on you, Aziel. My suspicious nature got the better of me. He may be your brother, after all. So dry your eyes and go to bed, woman. I will mix and drink my punch alone."

She rose and turned away from him, her apron still to her face. As she sobbed good-night, she added, going out of the door: "It's very sad to have an outlawed brother, and very hard to be called a liar because of it."

When she had closed the door, the old man's face lightened with a gleam that sparkled clear down in the depths of his cavernous eyes. He brought his wrinkled and blue-veined hands together, and rubbed them with many a chuckle, as he put this and that together, and saw his pleasing suspicion of who the man might be developing itself without a flaw in the chain of circumstances. He saw it all now plainly as the table before him. With this theory, everything that had transpired this evening worked to a charm. The man's secret coming; his stealthy departure; his wife's absence from the room; Aziel's unusual provision for his comfort, and her story, told with such excessive agitation,—all these, he saw, bore with marvelous truthfulness on his suspicion of the stranger's identity.

It was far past midnight when Silas Gagger went to his room. When he did so, he had matured a plan for future action, so studied in all its details that he had no fear of the result. The result? He could hardly restrain

himself from laughing outright, as he ascended the stairs and sought his couch, in a room adjoining that where the woman lay for whose entrapping he had spun so cunning a web. Perhaps there was a flaw in this web; for webs, as spiders know, often break where least expected.

CHAPTER VIII.

HISTORY IN PERSPECTIVE.

WHEN the retreating footsteps of the young man could be no longer heard, the storm of wrath and menace that had been hurtling over the features of Nicholas Grundle began slowly to pass away; but there still remained upon his face the traces of his angry outburst. Storm and passion alike leave behind them evidences of their violence, which neither the succeeding sunshine nor smile can immediately dispel or conceal. He had lowered his gun to the floor, and now stood leaning upon it, his form trembling with his subsiding passion; his eyes were fixed with a varying expression upon the girl—an expression that was now angry, now contemptuous, and now a trifle pitiful. But he said nothing, watching her in silence. He only shook his head, with the varying emotions of each successive mood in which he was regarding her.

The girl still knelt beside the door, where she had sunk down in her terror, overcome with the awful thought of the deadly peril from which her lover had just escaped. Her little hands were clasped in front of her; her head had fallen upon her breast. The loosened folds of her abundant hair spread themselves over her slight form, like an airy mantle of golden gossamer, hiding her white face in its creamy folds. She, too, was silent. Beyond the quivering of her lips and a slight trembling of her form with fear, dreading from her father, what, she could not tell, she knelt there like a statue in the act of prayer. From her downcast eyes—she dared not raise them to his

face—there stole quiet tears which dropped as gently on her bosom.

The attitude of supplianee and of fear seemed at last to change the current of his thoughts. He laid aside his weapon, went over to her, and patting her on the head, said, in a tone as kindly as he had ever spoken to her: "There, there, child! It is all over; I am not angry with you now."

As his hand rested on her head, he felt her draw slightly away from his touch, and when she looked up at him in obedience to his command, he saw, for the first time in her life, that her gaze shrank away from him. There was a drooping fear in her eyes such as he had never seen before. Until now those eyes had always met his with childish trustfulness and love. For an instant a shade of vexation, not unmingled with disappointment, passed across his face, but as suddenly it disappeared in the kindly smile he bent upon her. He stooped down and began to caress her hair and cheeks with a sudden eagerness of affection, murmuring the words of fondness and endearment that had so often been her delight in all these years they had been together. She reached out her hands, and taking his in her two palms, she pressed it with a fondling motion to her lips, and as she kissed it, a little gush of tears, in a baptism of reconciliation and forgiveness, fell upon it.

"Come, child," he said, his voice a trifle husky, for this one here had always power to stir his better emotions, and never so much as now—"come, tears were not made for your eyes. So drive them away and come and sit by me in yonder chair. I have something to say to you this night—ay, and to show you, too—that will make you happy, child, and prove to you how much your poor old father has loved you, and loves you still."

Never did child more eagerly seize upon a parent's promise. With a little cry of joy, she rose to her feet as he was speaking, and before he had finished, her arms were about his neck, and she exclaiming, in an exuberance of joy as sudden as a burst of sunshine from a cloudless sky:

"Oh, will you tell me, father—will you tell me to-

night? Oh, how I have longed to hear you promise this! I shall know all to-night?" looking up into his face, with her eyes sparkling through the tears that still trembled on her lashes; and then drawing nearer to him, until her head rested on his breast, she continued, a deeper yearning in her face and a tremor in her voice: "You will tell me now of mother? Oh, I do so want to hear about her! You will tell me how she looked, and what she did? and how much she loved me when I was a baby? and what she said?"

His countenance grew graver as she hurried on with these questions, as if she were touching on a forbidden topic; but he brushed away the frown with a quick gesture of his hand, and silently led her to her stool beside his chair. Then, as he slowly dropped into his seat, she placed herself close to his side. Her hands were now folded in a soft caress upon his knee, while her eyes, full of love, hope and curiosity, looked upward at him out of their innocent depths of childish trust.

"Put more wood on the fire," he said, abruptly, after several moments of silent gazing into her face, and reading there the expectancy of a revelation which he had no idea of making. Then, with a sudden show of gayety, he added, laughing in his shrill, broken voice, and clapping and rubbing his hands: "We must have the room bright to-night. Yes, it must be bright and warm to-night for my dear child and her doting old father."

She caught the infection of his gleeful manner, and, with a merry laugh, threw handful after handful of brushwood into the chimney-place. The fire, too, soon became merry. It crackled and snapped, and shot out its broadening flames, until on the round faces of the old andirons there seemed to come a smile of amazement at the generous heat about them. And, indeed, such a fire as this had never before blazed on Nicholas Grundle's hearth.

"Throw on some heavy sticks now," he cried, his merriment increasing. "Ha, ha! it's a glorious bright fire. We must make it last while we talk here together. There, that will do!" as she flung on several larger pieces of wood, which for an instant deadened the flames, sending up a column of brown smoke, that was reflected, as it were, in

the sombre look which now had come to his face. For, a man of sudden and curious moods, he was ever changing them when least expected. She resumed her seat by him, and they now sat watching the fire—she waiting for him to speak, and he hesitating to begin, so much he knew depended now upon the manner of his telling.

“Emily,” he said, at last, a tender seriousness in his voice, as he took her hand in one of his and laid the other fondly upon her head, turning her face gently toward him, “how much do you love me?”

“More than words can tell, father dear,” she answered, with a quick and affectionate response, as earnest and sympathetic in her look as if indeed she had been but a child at his knee, wondering why he had asked that which he knew so much better than she could tell him.

“You ought to love me very much,” he said, gently, putting aside her hair and gazing down into her face with an expression that absorbed his every feature in its passionate yearning. “For sixteen years, my child, I have lived only for you. From the very day you were born, you became a part of myself. Your life was mine, mine was yours. As well might they have asked me to tear my own heart out and live as to be happy away from you. Yes, yes! they thought it foolish in an old man like me to be so wrapped up in a child. But I kept on loving you, despite them all. And what pleasure it has been to me, all these years, to watch over you, guide you, teach you, and plan for you! But the time has passed too quickly,” he sighed—“yes, too quickly! You have grown too fast—too fast of late, my child!”

Here his hand dropped away from her head, and he fell into a sudden fit of musing, a sad look mellowing his wrinkled face, a far-off expression in his eyes, as they wandered about the room and finally rested upon the fire, while his lips murmured something she could not hear. She did not break in upon his meditations, though she longed to ask him so many questions—questions which had come to her night after night when she was alone in her little room, watching the stars, that gave her no answer, though she sought it with tears, gazing up at them with wistful longing. Oh, if they would only tell her

what was beyond—whether in that bright world to which they led the way her mother was watching and waiting for her! Oh, cruel stars! ever pointing the path to heaven, yet never revealing aught of its mystery or joy.

The girl quietly laid her head upon his knee, for he was still silent, and gazed with him into the bright flames, that seemed to beckon them back to happier thoughts. But though ruddier grew the fire, it had no cheering influence for them. He was looking forward, and she backward—she through the years that had gone, he through those to come. Youth and age had this night exchanged with each other the future for the past, and memory and hope alike were tinged with sadness. And she remembered—what? How strange it seemed to her that her memory should always start from the self-same point, behind which no effort of her mind could go! Strive ever so hard, she could begin her life only with the dimmest recollection of a face she believed, she knew not why, must have been her mother's. Where and when the face had bent over her she could not tell. But it was a face she had never seen again since that time it had disappeared, just how or when she could not recall, out of that past which floated, a half-defined vision, in her memories of childhood. But this face, invested as the years had passed with an ever-increasing halo of love and tenderness, had been and was the dearest treasure of her heart. She sank to sleep under its soft glances, and waking saw it beaming over her. And often in the day it was the sweet companion of her thoughts. Even now, as she looked at yonder fire, this face seemed to come out from the very flames and float upward, with its sweet smile, its yearning look and loving glance.

So it was of her mother's face that Emily thought, and in the absorbing contemplation of that dear countenance all else of her life was forgotten. With this vision so clear before her, she cared to recall no other memory of her strange life—a life which the briefest retrospect would have told her had been passed solely with this old man and the woman who now rested in the grass so near them—a life in which there had been no pleasure so great as this dim yet precious memory of a mother's face.

Nicholas Grundle was now reviewing her life and his under a far different aspect. To him thus far it had been a very happy, a very successful life. All that he had started out to accomplish had been brought to pass. He had reared the child separate and apart from the world, keeping her mind innocent of its follies and its vices. Besides himself, she had held converse in all these years with only one person, the housekeeper. He had educated her according to his own ideas of what she ought to know; taught her himself to read and write, and under his own ceaseless attention she had mastered grammar, arithmetic and geography, three branches of learning upon which he laid the greatest stress, and of which, he often told her when her interest flagged, the world was woefully ignorant.

Nor had he omitted to embellish her mind with history and science. Hour after hour he would read to her a careful selection of historical subjects, ancient and modern, always omitting anything that might suggest the passions and vices of mankind, or taint her thoughts with the slightest impurity. In the daytime, while in the garden, he taught her the sweet mysteries of flower and vegetable life, or the more hidden secrets of the earth itself; and often in the night he would lead her to the door, and point out to her the grand procession of the stars, their names, their movements and their constellations. Nor in her bringing up had he omitted the religious training of her heart. Stranger than all his strange life was it to see him reading to her at night, before they retired, some carefully selected passage from the Bible which bore alike on heavenly and filial duty.

Nor did he tire of the many questions she asked as he read the mysterious revelations of the sacred book. To one and all he made ready answer, leading her mind ever along the path of truth. When at last she knelt beside him and repeated the prayers he had taught her, he kissed her good-night, and prayed God to watch over her precious sleep. Thus had he brought her up. To-night came the questions to him, as he reviewed all his labors and anxiety, Will the result be what I have toiled for? Will these sixteen years at last bring forth the harvest for which

I have so patiently and diligently worked? Ah, these are the questions which all laborers in the vineyard of the world ask! And who shall answer them for them? Time here, eternity hereafter.

He turned to her now and spoke. She raised her face with glad expectancy, for surely he would tell her now what she had waited in silence to hear these many years; for on this subject of her mother he had forbidden her ever to speak to him, and she had obeyed him, though at the cost of many a secret pang of grief and yearning. Nor had the old housekeeper ever allowed this topic to pass her lips. Cold, taciturn and forbidding on all except trivial subjects, she had carried this secret into her grave.

"Emily," he said, speaking so abruptly that it startled her, "for what do you suppose I have been so carefully training you all these years? Why am I living with you all alone, devoting every hour to you? This is the first time, my child, I have ever asked you this question, and I want you to give it sufficient deliberation to enable you to answer it carefully."

It was a new question—one he had never asked or touched upon before. It made her hesitate a moment, but only a moment, for she replied, with a look of gratitude that expressed far more than her earnest words:

"You are training me to be a good woman, and oh," bringing her hands together, "I do hope I shall be one!"

"That's a good answer, my child," patting and kissing her; "but it doesn't go far enough, so I will complete it for you. I am trying to make a good woman of you, and a wise one, too, and you are fast becoming both," looking at her with a pride that for an instant softened the keenness of his gaze. "I have more in store for you than this. Heaven gave you beauty; I have done my best to cultivate your mind and guide your heart. Besides, I have done that without which your life would be a failure. It must not be a failure. No, no! I have schemed and toiled too hard for such an ending."

"Dear father, I will do all I can to be what you would have me," she said, softly.

He caught at these words with a smile, under the satisfaction of which there glimmered a wariness her innocence did not detect.

"Since you have so pledged yourself to be what I desire," he resumed, with more confidence in his voice and manner, "I will no longer keep from you the plan that I have kept steadily in view ever since you first sat upon my knee. What you have told me to-night warns me to keep silence no longer. You are no longer a child. I must talk to you now as a woman—one who, for the first time in her life, is called upon to decide between the happiness and misery of the future. So this boy to-day asked you to promise to become his wife, did he? What was it you said to him?"

"I told him I would ask you," she replied, drooping her eyes—for, despite the frankness of her nature, she felt a little shrinking in her heart, as if it would fain keep this secret there.

"What did he say to that?"

"He told me that I need not be afraid to ask you; that you were so kind to me that, if I told you I loved him, you would let him love me, and marry me some day."

This she had said with her eyes downcast, and with evident effort, for her lips had trembled as she spoke the words, and a flush of crimson, deepening as she went on, had dyed her cheeks with a rosy hue that vied with the color of her bright-red, arching mouth. She could not herself have accounted for this agitation and confusion, nor why, for the first time in her life, she found it cost her such an effort to confide in him. Even now an impulse was upon her to run away from his presence, or else burst into tears and ask him to question her no more.

He seemed to have penetrated her thoughts; for, putting out his hand, he stroked her hair with a reassuring gesture of his affection, and said: "There, there, child! you need not be afraid of me. The boy spoke fair to you, no doubt. But, some day, I will show you a man you will think more of than a hundred boys like this one, who talks of what he does not know and cannot understand."

She looked up at him with a questioning face, a dazed

look, as if she had heard his words only, and had no comprehension of their meaning except their earnestness.

"You wonder who this man shall be? Why, when you become a woman, he shall be your husband—a great man, a rich man. You shall live in a grand house with him. He will love you—worship you! All the women shall envy you—all the men envy him. And I? Why, I will sit all day and watch you, with these eyes running over with joy until they close for ever. So tell this boy to-morrow," he went on, with increasing enthusiasm, "that you cannot marry him, for your father has promised you to another man—a great man, a rich man, a noble man! Tell him I say my darling child shall never be a poor man's wife. She shall never know hardship, want and sorrow. No, no! Let him go his way again. He must find some one else to share his crust and water—for that is all he has to offer you."

Here he broke off in a wild, contemptuous laugh, and threw out his hands with a repellent disgust. Then, before the girl could give expression to one of the many thoughts that crowded on her mind, he said:

"We have talked about it enough to-night. To-morrow morning I will tell you more. Get me the Bible; it is time for bed."

She brought him the Book, and he opened it and read. But she heard never a word; only his voice, now and then, in shriller cadence, arrested the strange current of her thoughts, down which floated, in inextricable confusion, odd fancies, misgivings, hopes and fears.

CHAPTER IX.

A SUDDEN DEPARTURE.

TO Volney Slade just now the world was bright and alluring with promise. Standing on the threshold of the new life he had marked out for himself, he held no counsel with doubt. Buoyant, confident and strong in hope, he longed to begin that battle with the world in

which he already saw himself the easy victor, bearing away the spoils of wealth and fame. Restless, nervous and impatient, his life during the past five years had made him more so. He hated this farm life and everything connected with it. To him it was at best a dreary and monotonous existence, and his incessant longing to get away from it, and seek employment more congenial to his tastes, had at last taken definite form, in his resolution to leave his home and seek his fortune in the city. Nor had he any doubt of a good fortune awaiting him. No youth had ever felt more certain of that. It was there. All that he had to do was to go and work for it, and it would come. He was a firm believer in the gospel of work, in the fruits of industry; but it must be the work of his choice—work in which he could take an interest, and for which his genius was adapted. He had unwavering faith in his genius. He felt it struggling within him, and impatiently waiting, like himself, for a suitable opportunity to display itself. To be sure, he had invented many useful little appliances about the house and barn, which simplified and saved labor as well; but how trifling were these successes compared to what he could achieve had he the tools and the chance! And these he knew could only be found in the great city he had read about, where manufactories and machine shops, with tall chimneys and ponderous hammers, filled the air with smoke and din. Such was his anticipation, such his determination. In vain had his mother suggested the improbabilities of the one and the foolishness of the other. He only answered her with the impetuous reiteration of his resolution. His nurse had more than once ventured to affect his determination by appealing to his sympathies, and representing how lonely and miserable his mother and she would be without him. To this he would reply that of two evils he must choose the least; that it was better for them to be lonely than that he should remain on the farm and lose the golden opportunity of his life.

Another and perhaps as strong an inducement as his ambition to leave the place was his hatred for and contempt of his stepfather, and the irksomeness of a position which showed the slightest dependence upon his bounty. The

boyish jealousy, which, from the beginning of the courtship, had rebelled at this marriage, had firmly grown into an aversion which he took no pains to conceal, and which, on the other hand, was fully reciprocated. Stepfather and stepson had always been in collision—the one continually insisting on obedience and respect, the other as steadily refusing either. Thus from the first they had gone on combating each other, until now each held the other in derision and contempt, steadily avoiding each other's presence, and, when that was impossible, exchanging the fewest words of frigid civility.

This morning the young man had come down to his breakfast even later than usual. Worried and distracted in his mind about the girl he loved—for he had passed the night in many doubts and misgivings as to the result of his suit—he more than ever wished to eat his meal without the presence of his stepfather. He did not feel as if he could endure having his jaded mind goaded by the sneers or harsh words of this man, who lately had met him with little else. As he entered the room, he quickly saw that his stepfather, who cast him a surly look, was evidently waiting for his appearance. And the pale, anxious face of his mother, as she greeted him with a tremulous "Good-morning," had in its covert glance an imploring expressing, as if she were asking him for her sake to keep the peace with this man here. Beyond the haughty greeting of a stiff bow to the eyes that now scowled ominously at him, the young man made no return, but took his seat in silence, while a soft sigh of relief escaped his mother's lips. Only a few moments ago she had so dreaded their coming together. It was something to be thankful for that they had met at least in silence.

The silence, like that which hushes the air before the bursting of the storm, was of short duration, and as suddenly broken: "So you joined in the laugh against me last night, did you? You were one of those fools who tried to stop freedom of speech, were you? I saw you stamping and shouting with the rest. Yet you have the impudence to come this morning and sit down at my table and eat my bread and butter! What a high-spirited,

noble young man you are, to be sure, eating the bread of idleness, and content to be dependent on the man you so much despise !”

The anger with which the old man had begun to speak now subsided into the cutting sneer of these last words. There was a pause and a hush that for an instant succeeded this outburst. Then the young man slowly pushed away his plate, laid his knife and fork quietly beside it, and rose to his feet. His face was now even whiter than his mother's, who sprang toward him and caught him by the arm, and besought him to come away and make no reply. He smiled contemptuously at her fears, and put aside her hands, which he could scarcely release, so tightly did she cling to him. Then, folding his arms, he flashed his eyes upon the man who had insulted him. As yet he could not command himself to speak, nor could he wholly still the impulse that strove with him to wipe out this insult with a blow upon the craven face that now cowered beneath the white heat of his gaze.

At last he conquered himself and spoke, and in his voice was a forced calmness, which told full well what a torrent of wrath was surging beneath his utterance. “You have spoken the truth,” he said. “I do despise you, from the very bottom of my heart, and I despise myself to think I have so long remained under your roof and sat at your table. I have never eaten the bread of idleness; I have earned far more and better bread than your meanness has provided for this table, from which Poverty could go away hungry, and the appetite of Starvation look in vain for relief. Dependent on you ! No worse curse could fall upon man or beast. I thank God it is not for me to be a recipient of your generous bounty. I will gladly leave this place, this very day—yes, this very hour. And mark me well, sir, were it not for my mother, I had never entered your house, from which I carry not a single pleasant memory.”

Turning from him he went straight back to his room, to make good his promise of immediate departure. Upon returning, soon after, with a small valise in his hand, he found his mother alone, with her head bowed upon the table.

“Good-bye, mother!” he said, raising her face and kissing her wet cheeks. “I might as well go now as ever. You will see me again very soon. I will write to you in a few days, and when I am well on the road to success, I will come and tell you all about it. And, mother”—he hesitated, while his cheeks flushed and a softer tone came into his voice—“please forget my angry words of yesterday. I did not mean them. I know you have always done the best you could for me, and I am grateful to you for it, indeed I am.”

She drew his head down upon her bosom, and kissed him over and over again. She strained him to her heart as she had done in those dark and lonely days when he had been a child, and her crushed hopes had found life again in him. But as she had never told him then aught of her sorrow, so now she kept from him the revelation of the night before. Yes, he should go away ignorant of this fresh grief and greater peril which now threatened his mother. He returned her embrace, and pressing her lips with a parting kiss, he hurried to the door, dashing the tears from his eyes as he went. He had thought it an easy task to bid her good-bye, but in this brief space of parting what memories of her love came back to him! His hand was on the latch, when a faint cry from her called him back. And as he came to her, she put a purse into his hand. He refused to take it, for he knew how much of self-denial was represented in these scant savings.

“No, no—keep it!” he said. “You need this more than I. I have enough to take care of me until I can earn more. God bless you, mother! you are too kind to me. And I have been so harsh to you these past few days! But you have forgiven me fully, freely?”

For answer she caught him again in her outstretched arms; and in another moment he had gone out of the room, leaving her there, her face buried in her hands, the purse upon the floor where it had fallen. As he passed hurriedly through the kitchen, Azriel, darting across the room, placed herself in his way. She spoke his name hesitatingly, and with such a tender accent that he stopped, and greeted her with a kindlier look than was his wont

when she addressed him so familiarly. Strange he always thought it—and he had often told her so—that she should always talk and act toward him, when they were alone, as if she were still his nurse and he a child.

“You will let me call you Volney, now that you are going to leave me?” she said, laying her hand lightly upon his arm. “I heard it all,” nodding toward the room he had left, “and you spoke to him like a man, as you are,” looking at him proudly through eyes he saw had been weeping.

“Yes,” he rejoined, with triumph in his smile, as he took her hand in his hearty clasp; “I think I did honor to my nurse. You brought me up, Aziel—and I thank you for it—with an independent and unbroken spirit. It shall never bend or break beneath the power of such a man as he.”

“Nor any other man!” she said, her faith in him filling her face with a glow of confidence and admiration. “Wherever you go, I know you will be a king among men.”

“I shall try to make good your prophecy. But good-bye,” he said, shaking her hand. “I must get away from this house. I shall feel more like a man, when I have shaken its dust from my feet.”

Still she detained him. Her hands had crept slowly up to his shoulders with a tremulous motion. There was a yearning look on her face, as if she longed for something she dared not express; and in her eyes, that now fell beneath his questioning gaze, there was the self-same expression he had known from childhood, and had often seen in later years, when he had caught her looking at him from her seat behind the fireplace in the other room. It was a mysterious look this one, of love most certainly, yet veiled in an indescribable control of the features, as if its existence were a pleasure, but its full revelation must not find expression.

“Well, what is it?” he questioned, perplexed but patient. “What would my dear, good nurse ask of her boy?”

“A parting kiss,” she murmured, and he felt her hands clinging more closely to him.

"Is that all?" he laughed, throwing his arms about her. "Why, you poor hungry soul, there are three of them for you!" suiting the action to the word.

"And may I kiss you good-bye?" she said, still holding to him as if she could not let him go.

"Yes, yes! Why, Aziel, what an odd question! Kiss me all you want to, and then, I beg of you, let me go."

Smiling through her tears, she kissed him, bid him God-speed, and blessed him; then she turned slowly away, and hid her face in her apron. She could not bear to see him leave her; for, when he should go out of that door, she knew that all that had made her life happy had gone out with his departing steps.

"Good-bye, Aziel! You will soon hear from your boy."

With these words, that made her sobs break out afresh, he sprang across the threshold, and ran lightly down the path leading to the woodlands that skirted the rear of the farm, but was no portion of its domain. As soon as he reached the forest, he turned and took a parting look at the farm-house. He saw Aziel standing at the kitchen-door, and she waved her hand to him. He waved his in return, threw up his valise in the air, and caught it again, with a joyous shout. Then, with a bound, he leaped the fence, and disappeared in the woods. A few moments brought him to a little clearing which had been made by his own hands. Here a brook ran babbling along its course—a brook over which he had built a rustic bridge, from which he had launched many a boat that had foundered ere it began its voyage. On the farther bank, close by an old dead tree, was a seat he himself had fashioned there, years ago, out of dead limbs and branches. Into this seat—the place where he had spent many quiet, thoughtful hours—he cast himself, and soon he began to have thoughts more serious, and more pleasurable, too, than had ever before come to him in this place, which from boyhood had been his favorite resort.

CHAPTER X.

THE HASTE OF JEALOUSY.

LIFE had opened to Volney Slade in earnest now. Yet it was an agreeable opening, for from the threshold of expectation he was viewing the future. The sun, whose beams now fell upon him, was not warmer than his hopes, nor the wide blue heaven above him greater than his designs, which thrilled the blood in his veins as he pictured his future—a bright scroll upon which he should write his name in letters of gold. Twenty years old, and his own master! Happy thought. To think, to plan, to do for himself—what true freedom it was! The drudgery of farm-life left for ever, and the wide world before him—how his eye kindled and his heart vibrated with the thought! The birds that sang in the trees above him gave forth no more entrancing song than this, nor the merry brook no sweeter melody. After thus giving for quite a while free rein to his fancies and his hopes, he returned again to more sober thoughts; for, happy as he was in his present free condition, he did not forget that it had brought with it a responsibility for failure which now belonged to him alone. He had started out to be his own guide and counselor, and how, and where, and what to do, he must now for and by himself decide. He was not without a plan. Strong purpose never fails for want of a plan. His purpose in life had been too long, and thoughtfully, and resolutely forming to find him now asking himself what it was best for him to do, where he should go, and how begin his new life. He took out his pocket-book, and slowly began to examine its contents. A look of pleasure came to him as he turned over a small roll of bills, and knew that they assured him of food and shelter for some time to come, even if his first wages were small, as he anticipated they would be.

A deeper satisfaction stole over his features as he brought to view a small piece of paper and began to read it, half aloud. It was an advertisement, clipped from a weekly paper published in the city to which he

was going. It had been his custom to cut out of this journal any and all advertisements which bore in the least upon the trade to which he had devoted his thoughts and all his spare time. Many of these advertisements he had answered by letter, but the responses had as yet failed to come up to his expectations. But he had never despaired of success, and now he was sure of it. A machinist he had always hoped to be, and a machinist he should be, he thought, as he re-read this little slip of printed paper, which, coming into his possession only the day before, held out to him the greatest promise for his hopes.

It read as follows:

WANTED—A YOUNG MAN TO LEARN THE CARE OF Machinery, and to make himself generally useful in repairs, in a cotton factory. Apply to WILLIAM MARSH, at Highland Mills, Manayunk, Pa.

If this had been his own advertisement, written by himself, it could not better describe the situation he desired. This, to him, striking coincidence seemed the first stroke of fortune—a presentiment of his success. How odd if he were to get the place, and find himself to-morrow in the very situation he had longed and waited for! Nor did he think himself too sanguine. Stranger things than this had happened in the world. He had read of them, heard of them, and seen them. There had often been lucky chances in men's lives, a happy concurrence of circumstances that gave them success, or set them on the road to it, when they least expected help. Why should not Fortune smile on him? She did; she would. He knew it. Already he was transported to the scene of his labors and his triumphs. The lofty granite building, with story piled upon story, loomed up before him. He could see the smoke belching from the huge chimney, and hear the dull roar of the furnaces that made the mighty engine pulsate with an energy that vibrated through the great mass of machinery until the remotest spindle felt its throbbing life. He entered the spacious office with a hesitating step. But why had he hesitated? No sooner was his errand announced than he was told the situation had not been filled, and he could have it. And now he was at work, sur-

rounded by many of the machines he had read about, and some he thought he must have seen in his dreams, for they seemed familiar even in their strangeness. How glorious it all was! What a harmony in the thousand sounds of this rushing whirl, and din, and roar, and clatter of wheels and pulleys, and shafts and belts, and earding and spinning machines, and looms! Above it all rang out the laugh and song of happy labor, from the strong lungs of men, and the soft and sweeter lips of women.

The sweetest dreams end and visions vanish; and oftenest when we most believe them real and long for more. So it was with this one. He would have never of his own volition checked his imagination in his picture-painting, and would have gone on with his castle-building far into the day, had not the distant baying of a dog broken in upon his fancy's spell, and brought his mind back to the realities of the present hour with startling suddenness. He rose to his feet with a flash of joy and listened. Again the sound came from the valley, and he recognized it with that quick perception that ever belongs to a lover's ears. It was the baying of Emily's dog Cæsar. She must be with him. Another stroke of fortune! He could see her without waiting till evening, the usual hour for their secret meeting. He caught up his valise, and sped down the hill with flying feet; yet not faster did they leap along the ground than did his heart beat with eager excitement. A thousand conjectures as to the result of his interview with her rushed through his mind. What had she to tell him about the night before? What had her father said? Had he refused his consent? Was she still determined to love him? or was her father more to her than himself? Panting with his exertion, and with his face showing his excitement, he leaped the brook the last time in his headlong course, patted the dog, who had bounded to meet him, parted a dense copse of willows, and in another moment was in her presence. He would have rushed to her and caught her in his arms, but there was that in her look and attitude which restrained him.

Seated on the trunk of a fallen tree, Emily cast a shy look up at him, then dropped her eyes upon her hands, which were tightly folded in her lap, and worked convulsively,

as if she were striving in this way to get control of herself. She was trembling violently despite her efforts, and the tears, though forced back with all her will, would well up in her eyes. He gave no expression to the disappointment he felt at her strange and unusual reception. He approached her slowly, speaking her name softly; then he seated himself beside her and took her hand in his. It was cold and tremulous, but she did not draw it away from him. On the contrary, she nestled closer to him, and with a little sob laid her head upon his shoulder, her face still downcast and half hidden by the folds of her hood. He pushed away the hood and looked into her eyes. She gave back to his inquiring gaze an expression of love, that had a reserve and timidity in it he had never seen before. A great contrast was this to her frank and happy ways of only the day previous, when they had sat in this very spot, and she had talked and laughed with him as freely as a child might have done, telling him how much she loved him with an artlessness of manner as bewitching to him as the simple modesty with which she had received his caresses and listened to his plans for their married life—a life which was as new to her thoughts as any Arabian tale he might have told her.

What had wrought such a change in her? he asked himself, as he gazed more intently into her face; and somehow the returning smile was veiled in sadness. The look of love was still in her eyes, but out of their blue depths there came no sparkle, no rushing light of her soul through them, as if they would tell him more of her love, and better, too, than her lips could express. Unable longer to endure the suspense of his fears, he kissed her passionately, and begged her to speak and tell him what had so changed her.

"Tell me the worst," he said, with a confident smile, that had the faintest trace of bitterness in it. "I can bear to hear anything this morning. I never felt so strong or so defiant of fortune. Yes, Emily, I am able to cope with any ill-news, save that you do not love me. That I could not bear to hear, for your love is my strength, my hope, my only joy!"

"And you will always love me, won't you?" she asked,

with a trifle of energy in the suddenness with which she put the question. "You will not forget me? You could not grow tired of me?"

While there was a resolute faith in the earnest face upturned to his, there was in her voice a beseeching tone, as if the answer he would make should assure her beyond the slightest doubt of the endurance of his affection. Young though she was in love's experience, she had already learned that love's sweetest, dearest secret was the consciousness of being loved, and loved wholly, fully, devotedly, unceasingly, for ever.

At any other time, and under any other circumstances, had she asked him such questions, he would have laughed outright and gently chided her for being so silly. But just now, on the eve of his going away from her, and remembering his adventure at the cottage the night before, and his suspicions of what her father had been saying to her, these questions had a deeper meaning to him than the mere desire on her part to have him reiterate his pledges of affection. In them he heard the echo of her father's voice. They were to him the simple repetition of the old man's words, his suggestions, his poisonous insinuations, his evil prophecies, by which he hoped to bring their love to naught. How should he answer her? He tried to do so with something of calmness, but stung by the thought that her father had taken so mean an advantage of him, and not a little hurt that, influenced by such insinuations, she could be so ready to doubt him, he lost control of himself, and for the first time spoke harshly to her.

"If you loved me as much as you ought, or as I thought you did, you would not ask me such questions!" he said, looking at her for the instant half angrily, half contemptuously; then checking himself—for he saw her lips quiver, and her face grow white, with a scared look—he went on, trying to smile: "But I am not angry with you. Your father is to blame for this. He told you that my love for you could not last; that I would forget you—that I would grow tired of you. Oh, Emily!"—with a reproachful look, though he caught her in his arms and passionately kissed her—"how could you believe him?"

The veriest child, it seems to me, ought to have seen through his designs. Yet I forgot"—his voice more soothing and manner more tender—"you are but a child, after all—a child though a woman grown. You are not to blame; he has made you so. I love you all the more because you are so childlike in all your thoughts and ways. Were you otherwise, I would not love you half so much."

His words had well described her character and appearance, for in these respects she seemed indeed a child. She had a small and slight figure and a fresh, frank face, whose eyes wore the open look of honesty itself. Her words were as free as her manner, and both of them artless and innocent. Guileless to the fullest degree, she suspected no evil, for her own purity and ingenuousness were the measure of her faith and trust in others. He had called her a child; and who was more conscious of the fact than she herself, sitting here beside him, chiding herself for having asked him if he would always love her? Certainly she was a child, or she would not have put to him so foolish a question. Had he not told her many, many times that he would love her till his dying day? Had she not believed him? did she not believe him now? For answer to these questions, she put her arms around his neck and kissed him; for he had often told her that, when she loved him most, she must kiss him this way, and especially whenever she should see a frown upon his face.

"Forgive me," he said, pressing her to him. "I know you love me. I will never doubt you. Come what may between us, I am sure you will love me to the end!"

"What can come between us?" she asked, with questioning, wide-open eyes, clinging to him with a little shudder of fear. "I know you will always love me, and I shall always love you; and father says if I love you as much in four years from this time as I do now, I may marry you. Oh, we shall be so happy then!"

She clasped her hands together in an ecstasy of glee, but suddenly relapsed into silence, as she saw the grave look that had so quickly overshadowed his face.

"Four years to wait!" he bitterly exclaimed, after a

long pause, during which he had steadily scanned her face, as if he would find there some trace of mischief, some evidence that she had spoken these words only to try him. "Poor, innocent child! Your father may deceive you with such a promise, but he cannot me. Four years to wait! Who can tell what may not happen in those four years? No, no, Emily; your father might as well have said, 'Wait for ever,' for I see plainly he will never consent to our marriage. Tell me, what else did he say? What objection did he make to our marrying now, or as soon as I get a situation in the city and am able to support you?"

"He says I am too—too young to marry, that—that I must wait till I am twenty; and, besides, he wants me to see some one—"

Here she broke down. She could not go on and tell him this, when his face looked so distressed and sad. Already she saw a shadow of distrust creeping across his countenance, which sent a sharp pang through her heart and suddenly sealed her lips.

He was in no mood for silence now. Indeed, he had, with a lover's rapidity of reasoning, apprehended what she had been about to tell him, and, lover-like, he had misconstrued the motive of her silence. If she loved him with her whole heart, why did she not give him her full confidence? he asked himself. Was it possible that she, so childlike in appearance, had a designing and deceitful heart in her bosom? Why did she not tell him all, with that frank confidence and simple faith with which until this hour she had always talked to him? If she meant to be true to him, what was there for her to conceal? Goaded to a frenzy of jealousy, which showed itself in the tremor of his voice and the quick way with which he put her from him and rose to his feet, he stood looking down upon her in pity and anger, and, with all trace of love gone out of his face, said:

"So there is some one else, is there, to whom your kind father would give your heart and hand? And I am to wait until you see this man and decide between him and me? Oh, Emily, how you have deceived me! Your heart so fickle, and your vows so false! when I believed

you as fully as I would the Spirit of Truth come down from heaven."

He turned away from her and began to stride around the little inclosure where they were, biting his lips and clenching his hands, so overcome by the violence of his emotions that he could find no adequate expression for them, unless indeed he were to throw himself upon the ground and cry aloud in the agony of his despair.

And she? Poor child! With a great sob she buried her face in her hands, and rocking to and fro, wept tears more bitter than she had ever known. With the self-accusation born of her deep and abiding love for him, she blamed herself wholly for this grief she saw him in. She had caused it all—and when she loved him so! What should she do? She crept softly over to where he stood, white and rigid, his eyes fixed upon the ground, and put her hand upon his shoulder. He let it rest there, but did not turn, nor look at her, nor give any indication that he knew she was by him.

"Forgive me," she said, and with great effort, though the voice was tender and pleading. "You will speak to me again—you will—"

"Yes, I will speak to you!" and the cold harshness of his voice startled her so that she drew a pace away from him, and then, with a little gesture of dismay at the look he gave her, her head drooped upon her bosom, and she stood there as some girl-martyr of the olden time might have stood, waiting for the unseen blow so soon to fall. "I am going away from this place for good. Before night I shall be in the city, a hundred miles from here; and to-morrow I shall seek my fortune among strangers. God grant they may be kinder to me than you have been, Emily!"

She raised her head, and the white look of speechless agony in it, and the little half-articulate cry that parted her whiter lips, ought to have checked his passion—ay, melted his heart; but jealousy is blind as well as furious, and he went on:

"You cannot deny you have deceived me. You gave me your promise—yes, you even took a solemn vow—to be my wife, and now, as I leave you to go and seek my for-

tune, and foolishly thought that I should take with me the last assurance of your plighted love, you give me instead to understand that there is some one else between whom and me you are to choose. That choice"—with a derisive laugh—"is to be made within the next four years!"

She tried to speak to him, to move toward him, but she could do neither. It seemed to her as if her throat was filling up with some huge lump, and her hot tongue growing to the roof of her mouth, and her whole body gradually becoming rigid. His harsh utterances, and manner even more repelling, had driven back what she would have spoken and even struggled to articulate despite this chilling spell of silence. Neither voice nor words came to her aid, and he looking at her so reproachfully.

"Good-bye!" he said, turning to her with a gesture of contemptuous pity. "The sooner I go the better for us both. Besides, there are four years left to us to talk this matter over, should we meet again. And mark me, Emily, if we ever come together, it shall be at your request, not mine."

Like a terror-stricken child, she stood mute and motionless. Again she tried to speak to him, but she could not. She put out her hand gropingly, but it fell powerless to her side. Strange perversity of a lover's nature! He took these signs of weakness for evidences of guilt. She said nothing, because she had no defence to make. She even shrank from touching him, and well she might.

"Good-bye!" He touched her cheek with a cold kiss. "We will part with this formality, at least."

Before she could rouse herself to look up at him he was gone, and she heard his swift departing footsteps beyond the eopse that hid him from sight. He was gone! and what if she should never see him again? This was her sole and only thought, as she sank down where she was, and saw the blue sky, and trees, and fields fade into indistinctness, and then go out in utter darkness. When she returned to consciousness and opened her eyes, Cæsar, who had crept close beside her, whined and wagged his tail, and looked out of his great black eyes as sympathetically as if he understood all her trouble.

“Oh, Cæsar!” she cried, with a burst of tears, as the recollection of what had happened came back with sudden vividness, “he has gone, and I shall never see him again!”

Then, as if Cæsar were the only friend left to her in this cruel world, she threw her arms around him, laid her head upon his huge neck, and wept out her sorrow there.

CHAPTER XI.

WHO AND WHAT WAS HE?

NICHOLAS GRUNDLE had been a pleased spectator of what had occurred at the willow copse, for immediately after Emily had left the cottage, on her way to the brook, on the apparent errand of taking the cow to water, he had hastened to the barn with a cunning smile on his wrinkled face. Strange, indeed, was it that, so late in his life, he had learned—and learned it, too, where least expected—that Love teaches cunning to Innocence. Ascending the ladder with a more agile step than usual, he struggled through the hay, which threatened to stifle him with its cloud of dust and seeds, and placed himself beside a large chink in the boards, where he commanded a full view of the brook and its surroundings.

“So she still thinks she can deceive me, does she?” he muttered, pressing his eyes close to the aperture, and covering with his vision her retreating form. “She is going to meet him now—I can tell it by her walk. See, she turns around, and casts her eyes back, to see if I am watching her. Ah, she is a child no longer! She is a woman, and learning deception fast; and he has taught her. How blind I have been not sooner to see the change which has come over her! And yet, what change has there been in the child? None to me, at least—just as obedient, and docile, and loving, as ever. Have I not her promise, given this morning, that, when next she meets him, she will tell him he must wait four years, and that she has agreed with me to see the man of my choice

before she marries this fellow, who will never be able, of his own means, to marry? Yes, she may meet him in secret this morning, as she thinks she will; but I know she will be true to her promise to me—”

He stopped short in his soliloquy, for the movements of the girl now absorbed his attention. She had watered the cow, and, tethering the animal to a sapling that grew close beside the stream, she had herself gone, with the dog, into the little inclosure, where she seated herself upon the log, and Cæsar gambled around her.

“She is thinking of him now,” resumed the old man, noticing her quiet attitude, her head resting between her two hands, and her eyes bent upon the ground. “She little knows how angry he will be when she tells him what she has promised me. He will quarrel with her—I am sure of that. He will upbraid her, and charge her with deceiving him; and she—why, she will be frightened and lose her tongue, and he will take her silence for guilt. Just what I want! Ah, young man, she may love you, and you her, but I can see how well my plan will work to separate you, for a time at least; and, before you can come together again, we shall be in another part of the country. Ha, ha, Nicholas Grundle! You are as cunning as ever!”

He broke out into such a merry laugh, with his shrill, cackling voice, that a bat overhead was roused from his sleep, and darted on swift wing around the barn, rapidly circling here and there, as if some evil spirit were pursuing him, until he disappeared through the door.

“A good omen!” said Grundle, gleefully rubbing his hands as the bat flew away. “It tells me that fellow will leave Emily as quickly.”

He looked again in the direction of the brook, and his countenance on the instant was fixed in rapt and breathless attention. The lovers had met. He saw how they greeted each other, and every subsequent motion of their bodies was as intelligible to him as if he had heard their conversation.

“Yes, he is angry with her!” muttered Grundle, satisfaction deepening on his eager face. “See! he shakes his head and moves away from her. She tries to pacify him, and she puts her hand on his arm, but he does not turn to

her. There! he speaks in anger. I can see it, for she has started away from him. Ah, he kisses her, and then darts away out of sight! It's a quarrel, and a good one. It will last long enough for my purposes!"

After waiting a few moments to see whether the lover would return, Nicholas Grundle, congratulating himself with many a chuckle and rubbing of his hands, left his outlook, descended the ladder, and made his way to the cottage. As he came round to the front of the house, he found sitting upon the door-step, with a valise at his side, a tall man, who arose as he approached and extended his hand.

"Nicholas Grundle, I believe," he said, advancing to where the other had suddenly halted with that defensive air with which he always met strangers.

"What business have you with me?" asked Grundle, refusing the proffered hand, his lowering brows half concealing his penetrating look, which was rapidly scanning his companion from head to foot.

"Do you never receive any calls except those upon business?" asked the other, with a light laugh, as he stroked his moustache with a fair hand, on the finger of which glittered in the sunlight a coiled serpent with ruby eyes.

"Have you any business with me?" persisted Grundle, with an impatient fling of his head. "If so, come to it at once."

"You are a very impatient man, I should say," replied the stranger, with a smile and shrug of his shoulders. "Perhaps you will not object to my lighting a cigar before we proceed to business, if business indeed has brought me here? Will you take one?" extending his cigar-case, as he arose and drew a match upon the jamb of the door.

"I never smoke; I leave that to those who can afford to waste their money."

"You look as if you did not take much stock in the pleasures of this world," laughed the visitor, resuming his seat, and puffing forth a cloud of smoke, which a chance wind blew in Grundle's face. "I beg pardon; that impoliteness is due to the wind. Perhaps you do not object to smelling a good cigar?"

The cool impudence of the stranger had the very effect

he desired. It disconcerted the old man, and he stood irresolute as to what course he should pursue to rid himself of so bold and obstinate a visitor. Moreover, his curiosity had now been excited as to the object of this man's presence, and he found himself secretly wondering what it was that had led him to this place. Besides, the man was showing a disposition similar to his own, and that rather attracted him—so much so indeed that his first anger at this intrusion upon his privacy was gradually subsiding.

"You are wondering," resumed the stranger, again stroking his moustache with the hand that bore the serpent ring, "what I, a man whom you never saw before, have to do with you. Suppose I were to tell you that I have it in my power to make a fortune for you—that I could enable you to rise from the poverty of these surroundings to a position of wealth? If I could do this, you would look upon me as a friend, would you not?"

"If you did it, I should," said Grundle, keeping back all evidence of the intense curiosity the words just spoken had aroused.

"Yes; so would any one. And you are human, after all! Egad, I took you for a bear when you came around the corner a moment ago!"

And he laughed, lightly stroking his moustache, with the ring again in view. Whether purposely on the part of the exhibitor or not, the ring attracted Nicholas Grundle's attention. His eyes were now fixed upon it with a questioning, puzzled look, as the hand of the man lay at rest on his knee, the little head of the serpent poised over his knuckle.

"Yes, it is an odd ring," said the man, slightly raising his finger and regarding the jewel with admiration; "but it is the luckiest ring that was ever made. Would you believe that this ring," holding it up so that the old man, who had advanced a pace or two, could see it more distinctly, "has brought luck to three generations of my family? But perhaps you are not superstitious and do not believe in such things."

Yet, as he spoke, he saw the expression of awe that was deepening on Nicholas Grundle's face.

"I have heard of such things," said Grundle, still examining the jewel closely, though he did not touch it, nor the hand that wore it.

"I once refused nearly fifty thousand dollars for that ring," resumed the other, puffing away at his cigar with an indifferent air.

"Fifty thousand dollars!" exclaimed Grundle, under his breath, his eyes fastening with a quick, covetous gaze upon the jewel.

"But I did not take it. Yet—would you believe it?—the man who offered the sum came near getting the ring for nothing."

"Tell me about it," said Grundle, his voice low and agitated, and his eyes now fixed as immovably upon the ring as if it were a veritable serpent, and had charmed him with a deadly power of fascination.

"It's a short story, and hardly worth the telling, though it may interest you. A certain British lord was a few years ago a very intimate friend of mine, and of course in time learned from me the history and secret power of this ring. He squandered a great deal of his money in riotous living, and lost more by gambling and betting on horses. It finally came to pass that at one of the Derbys he lost the remainder of his fortune except about fifty thousand dollars. The day after the Derby I received a note from him to come to his château without delay. I did so, and found him in great excitement. He had sent away his servants and family to London, and was alone in his house. Immediately upon my arrival he led me directly to his library, and hardly had we entered the room before he closed the door, and, locking it, threw the key out of the window. Then he turned to me and, without parley or explanation, demanded that I should sell him this ring for a draft on the Bank of England for ten thousand pounds. Of course I refused his offer, but before I could give my reasons for so doing, he had seized me by the throat, and in the next instant I felt the cold muzzle of a pistol against my forehead. How it happened I cannot tell, but as we struggled in each other's grasp, and I had given up my life—for he had thrown me to the floor, and was holding me fast beneath him—the head of this ring

caught the trigger of his weapon, exploding the charge, and laying him a corpse at my feet, the ball penetrating the exact point in his forehead where he had held the pistol to mine. I need not tell you that I easily made my exit from the house through the window, and the next day sailed for America. I learned, upon my arrival here, that my lord had been buried as a suicide, who had taken his life because of his financial troubles. It's a strange story, isn't it? Sounds like a romance, yet I can assure you this ring has saved my life many times, in scenes almost as perilous as this I have just described. But, pshaw!" with a nonchalant wave of his hand, "I must stop talking about my ring, or I shall waste the whole morning, and profit neither you nor myself. To come at once to the object of my calling on you, would you be willing to tell me how many acres of land you own around here?"

"About forty," replied Nicholas Grundle, after a slight pause, in which he had made up his mind to talk further with this man, for he was a lucky one and might bring him fortune, as well as he had brought it to himself with his wonderful ring.

"Would you sell?"

"Yes; if I should get my price."

"What is your price?"

"Five hundred dollars an acre," was the reply.

"Whew!" exclaimed the stranger, blowing out a huge cloud of smoke, and waving it away with his hand. "Isn't that a very high figure?"

"It may be to the buyer, but not to the seller," said Grundle, concealing the agitation which the naming of such an exorbitant price had roused even in himself. "Still I am not a man to higgler for the last dollar in a bargain. Look around for yourself, and tell me what you would give for it."

The man arose, and, stepping a few paces from the house, began to take a survey of the little farm, directing his gaze to the different fields and boundaries, as Nicholas Grundle, trying to appear calmer, pointed them out, and expatiated upon the various excellences of the soil, and the beauty of the prospect and situation.

"You will not find a better farm of its size in this part of the country," said Grundle, as the stranger turned on his heel and went back to his seat. "It's worth all I ask; but, for cash down, I might take less, though not much."

As he was speaking, Cæsar came trotting around the corner of the house, and immediately following him was Emily, her eyes cast down, and slowly swinging to and fro her hood, which she held by its strings. Her hair had fallen loosely about her flushed face, and her whole manner was one of deep dejection. The stranger first saw her, and quickly rose to his feet, and none the less quickly came the look of admiration on his face as his eyes took in the figure before him; for she, too, had now looked up, and, startled by the sight of the strange man, had drawn back with a little cry of surprise, and, catching with her hand one side of her disheveled hair, she drew it back from her blooming cheek, and stood with timid, irresolute attitude, half frightened, yet half assured, for now she was looking at her father.

"Go into the house, my child," he said, now turning in the direction whence she had come. "This gentleman and I have business together, and when it is done I will come in to you. And here, Cæsar," speaking to the dog, who was surveying the stranger with a low growl of displeasure, "go with your mistress; we can spare you, too."

But the animal, instead of obeying this command, began to give even greater marks of his disapprobation of the visitor's presence. He was now showing his teeth, and had planted himself firmly in the man's front, and, half crouched, was lashing his tail upon the ground, and evidently preparing to spring at the stranger, who, recoiling from the beast, cried out to Nicholas Grundle to call him away. The old man caught the dog by the neck, but Cæsar paid no attention to this interruption of his design, and, flinging off his master's hand, was about to rush upon the other, when Emily's voice checked him, and in answer to her second call he turned away, with a deeper growl than ever, and disappeared with his mistress.

"Egad, that dog found little to fancy in me," said the

man, trying to treat the affair lightly, though his face was pale, and the perspiration stood out on his temples. "It is strange that he should take such a sudden dislike to me—for I love dogs, and dogs are always friendly to me."

"He always acts that way toward strangers," said Grundle; "and, as I have taught him to do so, I am to blame for his savage reception of you. It was lucky for you that the girl was near, or he would have done you harm. I never saw him so persistent before; and did you notice how he shook me off when I tried to pull him away?"

"He is a vicious dog," said the stranger. "I would not want to meet him on the road at night. The girl—Emily, I believe you call her—seems to have him under perfect control. Your granddaughter, I presume?"

"That question has often been asked me," replied Grundle, suddenly taking on his look and air of reserve, "but I never answer it. It's enough for people to know that she lives with me."

"Well, this is odd," resumed the man, lighting another cigar. "A beautiful girl—sixteen, I should judge—living with a man of your appearance and age, and you not willing to tell her relationship to you! That is a mystery! And she such a beauty! I drank it all in at a glance—slight form, golden, fluffy hair, and great, earnest blue eyes!"

"She is very pretty," said Grundle, pleased at the excited admiration of the man; "and she is as good as she is handsome."

"A rare combination in this world," rejoined the other, with a trifle of seriousness in his voice. "Egad, I would give a small fortune to know more of such a woman. Perfectly beautiful and thoroughly good! Well, if she went with the farm, I would give you a thousand dollars an acre for it. But I suppose her heart is already pledged to some of these country bumpkins around here—though, unless I mistake your character, you have been shrewd enough to prevent such a misfortune. Why, do you know," rising, and laying the hand with the ring on the old man's shoulder, and dropping his voice into a confidential whisper, "that, if she were a daughter or relation

of mine, she should buy both fortune and position with that face?"

"So she shall—so she shall!" replied the other, with more energy than he had yet displayed in his conversation. "You have not read me wrongly. I have not got these white hairs for nothing!" and a shrewd smile played over his face as he spoke.

"Well," said the stranger, turning abruptly and taking up his valise, "I have stayed here longer than I intended. I must hurry on to the village to meet a party with whom I have an engagement at noon. I will try and see you again. Let me see!" taking out his memorandum-book and making notes. "Nicholas Grundle, I believe—farm about forty acres—five hundred dollars an acre—or something less, for all cash down."

"Can't you give me an answer now?" asked Grundle, betraying in his voice and face the anxiety he strove to conceal. "I like off-hand bargains; they save trouble and time. If you say the word, I'll take four hundred and seventy-five dollars an acre in cash."

"That's hardly as generous a concession as my parties would expect. You see, my friend, I am looking around for others. But," with a knowing shake of the head, and laying his hand with a friendly gesture on the other's shoulder, "I am a friend to the old and the young. You and that beautiful girl shall find that I have worked for your interests in this matter. All I ask is that this visit and interview, and any others we may have, shall be a profound secret between us. You understand?"

"Perfectly!" said Grundle, his face beaming with an eager, covetous smile. "I know the value of a silent tongue."

"It's a fortune often to the possessor," laughed the other. "But, pardon me, would you object to taking charge of this valise for me till I return from the village—say till after sundown? for I don't expect to be through my business there before that time. It's quite heavy, and has sufficiently tested my endurance this morning."

"Of course I will take care of it," said Grundle, receiving it from the other and almost dropping it upon the ground, so unexpected was its heavy weight. "It is

heavy, as you say," holding it now with both hands, but not without considerable exertion.

"Let me carry it into the house for you," offered the man. "We will just set it behind the door. It will be safe enough there."

"No; I can manage it," quickly replied Grundle, drawing back from the other's proffered assistance.

"Well, just as you say, though I would prefer not to put you to so much trouble; and now I bid you good-morning!" raising his hat, and going rapidly down the walk into the main road, along which he hurried, not once looking back.

Nicholas Grundle set the valise down upon the ground and gazed upon it with very curious eyes. It was the heaviest and oddest valise he had ever seen.

CHAPTER XII.

THE VALISE AND THE LOCKET.

IT was indeed an odd-looking valise that the stranger had left in charge of Nicholas Grundle. No wonder the old man examined it so curiously, and was so excited as to what might be its contents. It was of medium size, and evidently of thin sheet iron, with flat sides and square corners, bound with dull steel bands. It had three locks—one a padlock, that secured a steel band which passed entirely around the valise; the other two were sunken locks, in the upper rims of the valise, where the sides joined when it was shut.

Nicholas Grundle, first assuring himself that the stranger was out of sight, now knelt down and carefully examined every inch of this curious affair. As he at last, in his inspection, turned it over so that the bottom was visible, he saw the three letters "J. L. A.," which had every appearance of having been there a long time, and the valise itself bore other evidences of age. Nor did the mystery of the contents of this strange valise less excite

the curiosity of the old man. He now found himself wondering what they were, and longing to know them, far beyond any adequate expression to his desire in thoughts or words. This much, anyhow, he felt sure of—it was certainly made for valuables. No man would carry around with him such a heavy and securely-locked box, unless he wished to take great care of what was in it.

What was in it? That was the question which Nicholas Grundle asked himself many times as he shook the valise from side to side, then turned it upside down and stood it on either end, and still heard no sound within it—not the faintest thud or rattle. Could it be full of gold, packed in so tightly it could not stir? This question startled him, almost taking away his breath. A box full of gold; and if gold, how much was there here? How quickly his eye took in the height, length and width of the box! Springing up, he weighed it again in his hands. How marvelously rapid was his power of calculation! It must weigh some seventy-odd pounds. Full of gold! Why, such a box would hold full twenty thousand dollars, and twenty thousand dollars in gold would be seventy-odd pounds in weight. Twenty thousand dollars! His heart thrilled with a tumultuous beating. With his hands tightly clasped, he leaned over the valise, and his eyes feasted upon it with a devouring gaze. If it were only his—his to see, to touch, to handle, to keep, to hide away in yonder cellar! And what a pleasure it was to be near so much money, even if it were not his own! How it stirred his blood, and quickened his pulse, and made his eyes sparkle! Throughout his shrunken frame there now glowed a new vigor, that made him feel strong enough to carry this weight a whole day, if such a task could only give him the ownership of its precious reality. He might have knelt there much longer, worshiping this treasure-box, had not Emily opened the door and called to him:

“Father, what is it? Shall I come out and help you carry it?”

Banishing all evidence of excitement in his face, he quickly rose to his feet, and lifted the valise as lightly as

if it had been an ordinary burden, and carried it into the house. He placed it in a corner near the closed door, and threw a strip of old carpet, which had been doing the service of a mat, over it. Then he turned to the girl, and said:

"It's only a traveling-bag left in our care for a little while by that gentleman you saw talking to me." Then, affecting surprise at the sorrow on her face, and the eyes which still bore the traces of tears, he continued: "What! my child has been crying? Come let us sit down," kissing her in his old tender way. "Tell your father what has grieved you!"

He led her to the stool beside his chair, and she sank into it with a little burst of tears, which she tried to hide with her hands clasped upon her face. He hesitated a moment before seating himself, turned warily around, and shot a sharp glance toward the corner where the strong box was. Then he crossed the room again, and hung his hat on a peg in the wall, over the valise; and, as he came and went, his eyes seemed loth to look anywhere else, save at that corner with the treasure, which he was sure was burning with a golden glow beneath the carpet covering. Now trying, though with little success, to banish for the moment all thought of that pile of gold, and to keep his eyes from seeking that corner, he took her hand in his, and patted it in silence; and this token of his affection—for she remembered how often he had patted her hand as he looked down at her, with his face all aglow with love for her—made her only cry the more, laying her head upon his knees, around which she threw her arms, clinging so closely to him now; for who else, her sad heart asked, cared for her now save this dear old father?

"Poor child!" he murmured, stroking her hair. "I know what you would tell me. You have seen him this morning, and he has wounded your sensitive heart. There, don't cry! He is not worth crying for. I knew he would soon show how little real love he has for you. Boys' loves, like their kites, never sail long in the same direction."

"Oh, father, he does not care for me any more! He has gone away angry; I shall never see him again!"

This she wailed out in a broken, smothered voice, her face still buried on his knee. He waited a while until she grew a trifle calmer, and strange it seemed to him that, while he waited, his eyes would glance behind him at the corner where the valise was. Once he thought it stirred. This suggestion startled him, and made his heart give a great thump. He cast a half-frightened, keener look over his shoulder. No, it had not moved. It was only one corner of the carpet that had fallen away from it. He could not help noticing how sharply the dog was watching this corner, stretched at full length in front of the valise, his head resting between his paws. How odd, it struck him, was the fascination this corner had for both himself and Cæsar! He turned again to the girl, whose grief had subsided into a gentle sobbing, broken now and then with a sigh.

"Never mind, child," he said, soothingly; "you are not to blame for what has happened, and that ought to be a great consolation to you. You only told him what your father had a right to ask you to say to him, and he was angry with you for it—angry because you obeyed your poor old father, who has sacrificed his whole life for you. He ought to have loved you the more, for true love always grows the stronger when it discovers some new quality of good in the object it adores. What nobler quality than obedience can a child show forth?"

"Do you think he will ever love me again?" she asked, turning up now, for the first time, her despairing, tearful face to him.

"Yes, perhaps," he answered, with an odd smile, "if you will let him see that you do not care so much for him as he imagines. A man is always the more eager to love when the task of conquest is made the harder for him."

"I do not know what you mean," she said, her face, as he was speaking, growing more and more puzzled, and yet not so much so as to smother the gleam of hope that was struggling to maintain itself in her eyes.

"Then I will explain to you. But first I must know a little more about this young man, and your promises and pledges to him. You told me, this morning, how and where you met him without my knowledge. I for-

give you that deception, child; for I am sure it was not of your inclination, suggestion or invention. What I want now to know is, has he given you any token of his so-called love, any little keepsake, any—”

He stopped short, for he saw her hand suddenly seek, with a startled motion, her bosom, and he knew that there was hidden the very thing he sought to discover. She hesitated, but only an instant; then, with a diffidence that was as charming as the deep blush of embarrassment that suffused her cheeks and caused her head to droop, she slowly drew forth a little golden locket, and placed it without a word—only a sigh—in his outstretched hand.

“Is this all he has given you?” he asked, turning over the locket, and examining it so closely as to detect their initials, interwoven across the faces of two impinging hearts.

“That is all,” she faintly articulated, still abashed, her head drooping and her fingers nervously interlacing each other.

“When did he give you this?”

“Day before yesterday,” she faltered out, with a fresh outburst of tears, for this question too fully suggested how brief a time had elapsed between the gift and what had taken place this morning at the willow copse.

“So, two days after giving you this very touching emblem of his affection,” went on the old man, with no little sarcasm in his voice, “he acts as if he had no love for you. Ah, my child, he is very far from being worthy of you. I have a mind to throw this thing into the fire,” he said, making a motion as if to do so, and as suddenly drawing back his arm. “No; I will not. It shall serve a better purpose,” as if the plan had suddenly occurred to him: “you shall send it back to him. It is not right that you should keep it longer, since he has treated you so. Yes, yes! we must send it back to him. It has now no value to you, and he can sell it for old gold, or keep it to remind himself that he was unjust and cruel to you, my dear child.”

She knew not how to answer him, but he readily comprehended the perplexity and distress which had come to her face. His decision that she must send back the locket

had made her suddenly conscious how much she valued it—how in it were centered so many happy thoughts, so many sweet memories, that to part with it would be to part with even the remnant of happiness that its possessor had saved from the wreck of the morning.

“Please, dear father, let me keep it a little while?” she asked, making the request with evident effort, for she did not raise her eyes, but, putting her hands with a pleading gesture upon his arm, her averted face had slowly fallen upon his knee.

“Poor, innocent child!” he said, softly resting his hand upon her head. “So you want to keep this locket to always remind you how true you were to him, and how little real love he had for you? What pleasure could you have in remembering anything so sad?”

She only answered him as before. “Please let me keep it a little while, only a few days,” was all she said.

He made no reply. Slowly closing his fingers upon the locket, he was the next instant plunged in deep thought, as though he were solving a question of gravest issue. Deeper grew the wrinkles on his face, stronger became the lines on his forehead, and lower over his eyes drooped his heavy brows, until his pupils looked like black spots peeping out beneath little rifts of snow. While he thought on, his eyes more than once sought the corner where the strong box lay, covered, in front, by the dog, who still kept his silent watch upon it. As he found his gaze riveted upon this box, he began to acknowledge to himself that it by some means had worked a spell upon him. He could not keep his eyes away from it, any more than could Cæsar. What was the object of its strange construction? and what did it contain? were crowding out all other thoughts from his mind—almost this very one of the disposition of the locket, which he was now trying to decide. If he only knew what was in that valise! It had three locks. Were they the simple locks that were usually found on traveling-bags, or were they as strange and complex as the bag itself? Could they be picked? He had picked many locks when a boy. He remembered now, with a sudden transport of joy, that smoothed out the wrinkles and furrows, how deftly he had worked with a bent piece

of wire on the locks of his mother's trunks in the old garret of his boyhood, where he had spent many a mysterious hour. There was some wire in the box in the drawer yonder. Now, if he were only alone a little while with that valise! But the girl—how to dispose of her in the mean time? To this question the valise seemed to whisper back the answer: Send her away. Send her away! Where? And the locket now answered as quickly as the valise had done: Send her with me. These words, leaping unbidden into his consciousness, were a revelation to him. He opened his hand slowly, and the locket, as if with a subtle influence, carried him on in a train of reasoning which could have but one result. For what element of danger was there in his plan, which seemed to adjust itself so harmoniously to the wishes he had in view? Would not the young man's mother prove an invaluable aid to him in impressing upon this child how hopeless it was for her to think of regaining her son's love? Would she not, with a woman's quick wit, poison this child against her son? Certainly she would, for it was only yesterday morning that a woman, passing along the road in front of the cottage, had put in his hands a letter from this young man's mother, in which she had pleaded with him, Nicholas Grundle, to do all he could to break off their intercourse and put an end to their love.

"My child, did you ever see Mrs. Gagger?" asked the old man, turning again to Emily, as she sat quietly and dejectedly at his side, her hope of retaining the locket growing fainter and fainter during his long silence.

"No, I never saw her," the name forcing a faint sigh from her lips.

"Well, you shall see her this morning," he said, slowly rising from his chair and going to a chest of drawers, out of which he took a piece of white paper, and proceeded to wrap the locket in it. "Here, my child, hide this in your pocket. Now put on your hood and throw that shawl about you. I have an errand for you."

She did as he had bidden her, and yet it was evident, from the simple look of wonder on her face, that she had no idea of what this errand might be, about which he was in such haste. He took her hand in his and led her to the

back door, which he opened, and then placed her at his side upon the threshold. He raised his hand and pointed across the distant fields, bathed in the crisp, clear air of the late autumnal day.

"Do you see, on yonder hill, a white house over which the sun shines brightly?" he asked.

"Yes; that is where Mrs. Gagger lives."

As she answered him, her heart fluttered with a faint apprehension of joy, yet not without distrust. Could it be possible her father was going to send her there—a place she had longed to visit these many days? But what, she asked herself, despite the self-approving sense of beauty that stole across her mind, if she should see his mother, and that great lady should not be pleased with her! What hope would there be left her of winning back him who had gone away in anger, and to whom his mother would be far dearer than she herself was now? The old man felt how her hand trembled in his, and he as quickly divined the reason, although its discovery was far from apparent in his next question. How well he knew this child! And why not? Was she not the result of his own exclusive training and influence?

"You will not be afraid to go and see her for me, and carry her a message?"

"Why should I be afraid of her?" she asked, with sudden earnestness, noticing the serious look upon his face while he was putting this question.

"No reason for it, my child, that I know of, except that it will be the first time you ever met a stranger without me by your side. So you are willing to go alone?"

"Yes, with Cæsar," glancing back at the dog, which still lay motionless in front of the valise.

"Cæsar shall go with you. No harm can come to you with him. Now listen, my child, for you must repeat, as nearly as you can, my very words to Mrs. Gagger. When you meet her, you must courtesy, and say, 'Good-morning, madam,' and then go on this way, without waiting for her to speak: 'Mrs. Gagger, my father has sent me to return this locket'—placing the locket in her hands as you say the words. 'He does not wish me to keep it, under the circumstances, and asks you to give it back to your son.'

Having said this, you must courtesy again, say 'Good-morning, madam,' and come away without another word. Can you remember this? Let me see if you can. Repeat what I have said."

She did so in a trembling voice, but with so many mistakes that he reproved her several times as he corrected them.

"I see you do not understand why I wish you to do this," he said, shaking his head, in a mysterious way; "but this much I will tell you—that the young man, if he love you at all, will love you all the more for it. It will tell him that you do not hold yourself so cheaply as he thinks, and that, if he wants your love, he must win it, not demand it. Trust your father, my child. You have only once deceived me, and you already see the bad result. Obey me now, and you may win back the love you have certainly lost. Not my love—for that you have, and always shall have—but this other love, to gain which you have both deceived and disobeyed me."

She could not understand his reasoning. She did not even try, for he seemed to her to speak in riddles. But she knew, from the determination of his face, that she must obey him; and, as he ceased speaking, a strange passiveness came over her—a passiveness not of her own bidding or desire, but the result of some unseen power which seemed to work from without her.

With a covert smile, he saw the look of resignation and obedience that had come so unwillingly to her face; but as quickly changing his smile into a wondrously merry laugh, he said, patting her on the head, and then rubbing his hands together in continued glee:

"Aha, my child! we will now manage it all for the best. You shall soon see how right your father is. Come—lose no time; and you had better go by the fields. The public road is not the place for my dear child to travel. Here, Cæsar," calling to the dog, "come, and go with your mistress."

The dog paid not the slightest heed to this summons. He did not raise his head, nor even move it ever so slightly in the direction of the old man's voice. As if he had indeed turned to stone, he still lay at full length

in front of the valise, as motionless as that article itself. Only in his wide-open gleaming eyes was there any sign of life. Nicholas Grundle called again, more sharply than before, and seeing the animal still paid no heed to him, he burst into a passion of threatening words. Then, seizing his cane and furiously shaking it, he started toward the dog. Emily anticipated his intentions. She sprang swiftly past him, and catching Cæsar by the collar, covered him with her protecting form.

"Do not strike him!" she said, in a voice whose tone of warning made him suddenly halt; and, if he had needed further warning to control himself, he saw it now in the attitude of the dog, who had sprung from behind his mistress, and, but for her restraining hand upon his collar, would have fastened his fangs in his adversary.

"What ails the brute?" muttered Grundle, sidling away. "Is he going mad? I have a mind to shoot him!"

"No, no; he is not to blame!" she answered quickly, patting Cæsar so soothingly that he turned and licked her hand. "There was something about that strange man he did not like. I saw that from the moment he laid eyes on him. Because he knows that this valise belongs to the man—for he must have seen it on the step beside him—is the reason he has been watching it so closely. Cæsar is such a knowing dog, father. Don't you remember how often he has warned us against people we did not suspect?"

"Yes; that may be all true," he replied, with a doubtful shake of the head. "But don't you see how he has turned against me to-day? He licks your hand, but would bite mine as quickly, if he had a chance."

"You shall see," said she, "how wrong you are. Here, Cæsar, come and kiss father's hand as you do mine."

She led him to where her parent stood. Then, taking her father's hand in hers, she extended it to the dog, and gently commanded him to kiss it, which he did, though not without every evidence of reluctance in his manner.

"I told you he was not liking me over-much," muttered the old man. "I wonder what he means by it? We have, until this day, been fast friends."

"I know he means you no harm, father. I can see he is angry, but not with you or me. He has seen something in that stranger which has made him act in this way. Perhaps he is trying to warn us against him."

"My child," he replied, with a little smile of derision, "you believe that dog knows everything; that he sees what we see, and reasons as we reason, and can do all we do in the way of intelligence except talk; and now you are ready to believe that he can read a man's character better than your old father can. Tut, tut, my child! Men are men, and dogs are dogs. There! we will talk no more of such nonsense as the dog's knowing more than we do. Come, hurry away on your errand, and let me see how soon you can dispatch such a trifle of business. Be careful"—as she was about to leave the threshold, from which Cæsar had already bounded, in obedience to a wave of her hand—"not a word more must you say than what I have told you. Remember our motto: 'The silent tongue is always safe.'"

She nodded her head with a look of comprehension, and, bidding him good-bye, went down the path that led to the brook. Along this stream she bent her steps. Never before had the waters for her so dull a sparkle, or so sad a murmur; and she, with her hand clasping the locket, tried to think that taking it back to Volney's mother was all for the best; yet she could not help crying every time she looked up and saw the house where he had lived shining so brightly in the sun.

As for Nicholas Grundle, he seemed, from the moment the girl had passed out of sight, inspired with wonderful activity. His movements became as quick and agile as a boy's. Shutting the door with a slam, he turned the key in the lock. Then, hurrying from casement to casement, he drew every curtain closely, so that no person from without could look through the windows. The front door he barred, dropping, with nervous haste, its thick wooden bar into the iron clamps that stood out from either jamb. Having thus assured his immunity from surprise, he ran

on tip-toe to the chest of drawers. Unlocking the upper compartment of this, he snatched out a coil of wire, and twisted off a piece as readily as if it had been a silken strand. With this piece of wire in his hand, he darted over to the valise. In another instant he had placed it upon the deal table, standing by the window, which, with its muslin curtain slightly drawn, commanded a view of the road that led from the village. Here, securely hidden from outside view, he could work at the valise, and watch the road as well.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT WAS SAID TO PAT DOYLE.

THE wife of Silas Gagger stood at the farm-house window, her hands upon its ledge, gazing with a dazed look down the lane, where her husband had doggedly passed out of sight; she had seen him stop for an instant, and turning around angrily, shake his cane in the direction of the home he had left. Then, with a shrug of the shoulders, he had disappeared, with the same determined stride, behind the maple-bushes that skirted the road leading to the village. It was useless for her to ask herself why he had left his home so unceremoniously. Even if her mind were now the clearest, she could not find any reason for this odd and unexpected departure, nor had he given the slightest explanation of it. All she knew about his going was this: almost as soon as her son had gone from the house, her husband had reappeared in this room, where the scarcely tasted breakfast still remained upon the table; he threw his valise upon the floor with a thud and an oath that startled her, as she suddenly raised her head from the table where she had been weeping, and saw his cold, keen eyes fastened upon her.

“I am going away,” he had said. “I may be back in a month, or a year, or never; and I guess it makes mighty little difference to you which.”

Then putting on his hat and coat, and seizing his cane

and valise, he had stalked out of the door without another word, only casting back at her a contemptuous look. Thus he had left her, and now she had seen him disappear from her sight. Overcome by an impulse she could not resist, despite his treatment of her, she had rushed to the door, and would have called to him to return had not Aziel caught her arm and gently led her back to a seat by the fireplace.

"There, there, poor dear!" said Aziel, leaning over her and gently stroking her head; "calm yourself. I heard it all. Let him go, if he chooses. You could not influence him against his will. It's only a freak of his passion, I dare say, and he may change his mind the next hour, and return to us too soon for our comfort. He knows too well how miserable he can make us by staying here. See!" glancing out of the window, and pointing with a little gesture of triumph in the direction of the barn, where Gagger had suddenly reappeared, "he has come back to the barn, after all his talk. If he intended to stay away the length of time he threatened, he would not take his horse and wagon."

"True, true!" said the woman with a sigh, yet doubtfully shaking her head, as she slowly put out her hand and pressed Aziel's with a firm grasp, as it lay upon the arm of her chair; "but why should he go away at all? Can it be possible," she asked, with a little shudder, "that he met Seth last night, or has any suspicions of who was here with us? It may be so—though I pray Heaven not—and his leaving us so suddenly may have some connection with last night's doings. You know he did not believe the man was your brother. I am afraid he has some clue, which he is going away to follow out; for it must be something strangely unusual that for the first time in five years takes him away even for a day from his home."

"Well," replied Aziel, assuming a confidence in voice and manner she by no means felt, "suppose he has suspicions, what are they worth unless he can confirm them? I'll warrant you the man who was here last night will be more than a match for him—"

"Yes, and for us, too," interrupted the listener, with

a shudder at the mention of this other man. "Aziel," she went on, in a voice half articulate, which gave greater expression to her frightened face, "you cannot tell how I fear Seth Slade. Nothing will be too cruel for him to do. I lay awake all night trying to banish him from my thoughts and get his image out of my eyes. Well"—lowering her voice—"thank Heaven, there is one sure escape from him. Do not be shocked when I tell you that sooner than be his wife again I shall take my own life!"

The white lips closed firmly as a look of stony determination settled on her face.

"Fudge! fudge!" rejoined the other cheerily, and playfully patting the shoulder of her companion. "What a foolish woman you are, to let such silly ideas come into your head! Of course he cannot make you become his wife again. Are you not married to Mr. Gagger? Certainly two men cannot have the same wife. It's against the law; and, if you have the law on your side, why need you fear Seth Slade or what he may try to do? So put your mind to rest on that point. To make sure that I am right—and I feel sure I am—I shall go down to Rader Craft's this very day, and get the law, word for word, on the whole subject. Rader Craft is too much of a gentleman to ask me why I want the information."

"What if you should find that the law is exactly what *he* read to me last evening from that slip of paper, and which but a little while ago you repeated better than I, as we tried to recall it to mind?"

"Well," replied Aziel, with a readiness that brought a rift of encouragement across the face that was earnestly bent on hers, "if it be the law, Rader Craft shall show us how to get justice, in spite of the law—"

This conversation was interrupted by the sound of a man's heavy and shuffling tread on the kitchen floor. The women listened, and despite the seriousness of their thoughts, they could but smile as they heard this soliloquy from Pat Doyle, the man-servant about the farm:

"Bedad, Pat Doyle, it's a lively breakfast afore ye—an empty table, wid a knife and fork, and a plate as smooth as the back of a duck. It's not much that Misthress

Loyd is lookin' afther yer illigant appetite this mornin'."

Reassuring her companion that either the law or Rader Craft would be on their side, and in either case they were safe, and urging her to compose herself and take fresh hope, Aziel seized the plate of meat and potatoes, and hastened into the kitchen, and apologized to Pat without delay, who, with a woeful visage, was already seated at his empty table.

"You must excuse me, Pat," she said, placing the dishes before him, which he instantly attacked, transferring to his plate a large portion of their contents, "but I have been so busy this morning, getting Master Volney ready to go away, that your breakfast is rather late."

"Yis, indade, it is late; but, faix, I'll ate it all the faster to make up for the lost toime. Bedad, I wor thinkin' I wud git my breakfast for dinner, so I wor. So Masther Volney has gone, has he? Good luck to him!" stopping to swallow a huge gulp of coffee, which made the bottom of the cup visible. "And ould Gagger's going too? May the divil fly away wid him! It's not lovin' him much I am this long time past. Troth, as I wor talkin' to him in the barn beyant, I'd given a week's wages to lather him, bad 'cess to him! Have ye another wee dhrop of the coffee, Misthress Loyd?"

"Indeed I have, Pat," rejoined Aziel, quickly filling his cup, and then preparing to fry him some eggs and ham, his favorite dish, but not before she had loaded his table with all she had brought from the other room, and closed the door softly after her, so that they were now alone.

"Is it iggs an' ham yer goin' to give me?" asked Pat, poising his loaded fork and knife halfway between his plate and his mouth, and eying her preparations with astonished delight. "Is it killin' me wid kindness you'd be afther doin' this mornin', Misthress Loyd?"

"You have waited so long for your breakfast, I am determined you shall have a good one for your patience," replied Aziel, putting the skillet, in which she had laid a generous slice of ham, upon the fire. "So Mr. Gagger told you he was going away, did he?" she asked, in an

indifferent voice, as if she were merely keeping up the conversation.

"Indade he did, Misthress Loyd; an' sich a tattherin' rage he wor in! Shure, I wor wishin' meself up wid de weathercock on the roof o' the barn while he wor talkin' to me."

And Pat, heaving a great sigh of relief, as if he had just escaped some imminent danger to his life, resumed with renewed vigor his onslaught upon the food before him.

"Pray what was he angry with you about?" questioned Aziel, with careless interest, as she turned over the slice of ham and replaced the skillet in position.

"Och, the divil himself couldn't answer that connundhrum, Misthress Loyd! But, faix, you wud have laughed to say him a-sthampin', an' a-swearin', an' a-blackguardin' me! Arrah, I thought the flure wud a-come down atwixt us—the owld faggot!"

"Why, Pat, that was a very strange way for him to act. Certainly he had no fault to find with you or your work. I am sure he will never get another man to serve him better than you have done, or half so well. What did he say? I cannot understand such conduct."

"Did ye iver lick a dog first, and tell him to mind ye afterward?" asked Pat, looking up at her, with a twinkle in his eye, as she placed the ham on his plate. "Faix, that's what he wor doin' to me, the owld desaiwer—goin' on wid his goostherumfoodle like he wor mad."

"So, then, he wasn't angry with you, after all?" said Aziel, going back to the stove with the skillet, into which she speedily broke several eggs, and set them sizzling upon the fire.

"An' is it three iggs yer cookin' for me?" exclaimed Pat. "Bedad, it's a pig or a hen I'll be afore I lave this table if ye kape on wid yer ginerous hand, Misthress Loyd! It's too kind to me ye are."

"Not at all, Pat—not at all," she replied, shaking her head at him, with a merry smile. "You deserve just as good a breakfast as I can get you. There!" putting the eggs alongside the ham, which was fast disappearing; "is there anything else you would like?"

"Thank you kindly, Misthress Loyd. God save ye,

ma'am! Barrin' the sarvin' of you, there's nothin' wantin' this mornin' to raise the cockles o' me heart," he replied, casting at her a half-timid, significant look; and then, as if he had said something he did not intend to say, and might regret, he flushed and coughed violently, and began vigorously to sprinkle his eggs with pepper and salt.

"Pat, do you know of any way you could serve me?" she asked, assuming a more confidential tone, and looking at him with an earnest and winning smile that would have dispelled all thoughts of secrecy in a heart far more deceitful than his.

He looked at her for just one instant with hesitancy and doubt upon his face, and then, as quickly dismissing both, he laid down his knife and fork. Leaning toward her, with his great black eyes full of mystery, he asked, in a mysterious whisper, glancing toward the door of the other room,

"Whisht! is the lady in the room beyant? She must not hear me, for it consarns her. Heaven save her kindly!" with a reverent look upward.

Aziel stepped softly across the floor, looked through the keyhole, and came back to him with her finger on her lips.

"She is sitting by the farther window," she whispered. "She cannot hear you if you speak softly. Go on, now, and tell me quickly what you know that concerns her."

"It's moighty quick I'll out wid it, then. Aisy now, an' I'll tell ye how it all wor. The owld sthrap came out to the barn a while ago wid his walise, an' he flung it agin the back o' me, while I wor sittin' on the flure a-cleanin' the tibakky out o' me pipe. 'Get up there, ye loafer!' says he; an' thin, while I wor holdin' on to me back, afeared it wor gone in two intirely for the blow of him, he began to curse an' to swear at me, till I thought the divil himself would come up out of the flure an' exchange places wid him. 'I'll discharge you when I come back,' says he. 'Discharge me, if ye loikes,' says I, 'but don't be afther dischargin' that walise at me ag'in. It's not playin' base-ball I am so early in the mornin'.' Wid

that, all of a suddint he sthopped cursin', an' says he, laughin', wid the grin o' the divil on him, 'Pat, it's only tryin' your pluck I am. Listen! I am goin' away for a month, an' I lave the house an' the wimmin' in your care.' 'Bliss their purty faces!' says I; 'it's not sleepin' I'll be, day nor night, for the care o' them angels, while you're gone.' Thin says he, comin' close up to me, an' layin' the dhirty hand o' him on me honest shoulder, 'Pat,' says he—an' the smile o' him was loike the divil's own face wid the colic—'watch the house day an' night,' says he, 'an' if ye notice any stranger comin' about the house while I'm gone, I'll give ye tin dollars, whin I come back, if ye find out who he is, an' who he comes to see.' An' wid that he puts, by the same token, a half-dollar in me hand, an' givin' a murderous wink wid the two bad eyes of him, he whispered, 'An', Pat, kape all this a sacret 'twixt you an' me.' 'Av coorse,' says I. An' thin says he, wid a whisper on him that wud tear out the ear o' ye, 'Pat, did ye see any strange man about the house last avenin'?' 'No,' says I; for the lie lepped in me throat afore I could swallow it, an' it's not him I'd be tellin', anyhow, what I see. No; may the divil cut the tongue out o' me if iver I tell Mr. Silas Gagger—an' that's his name in full, I belave—what me eyes see or me ears hear. An' that, barrin' a few threatenin' words, Mistrhess Loyd, is all what passed atwixt us in the barn beyant; for, mind your beautiful eyes, I wor not stayin' long wid him afther he axed me that question. It wor hearin' the breakfast bell I wor doin' immadiately—Heaven forgive me the desait!—an' afore the owld stack of rags cud pledge me anither word I wor out o' the barn and a-runnin' toward the house loike a pig wid his nose in the air!"

Having finished his narration, he shook his head knowingly, and saying, "It's Pat Doyle that's a match for the divil an' his angels, providin' he's awake whin they call on him," he took up his knife and fork, and began to eat again, with a freshened appetite.

"Did you see any strange man around here last night?" asked the woman, with a feigned look of surprise; for, before she would at all commit herself with him, she

must first learn just how much or how little he knew of the occurrence of the previous night.

"Did I see him?" rejoined Pat, with a quizzical expression on his broad face. "Shure, is it makin' fun o' me ye are, Misthress Loyd?" And then suddenly dropping his voice to a mournful cadence, while his face as quickly grew serious, he half whispered: "Indade, Misthress Loyd, it's the God's thruth I'm tellin' ye now. Oh, wirra! wirra!" throwing up his hands in genuine dismay, "it's not sleepin' all night I am for the sight o' that man. But it was watchin' him all the time I wor. Bluranages! I kept me two eyes on him, through the windy, all the while. Oh, be me sowl, had I caught sight o' him layin' a heavy hand on ye, or the lady beyant, it's into the room I'd a-lopped loike a tiger, and laid him low wid a blow o' me fist! Shure, it's bad luck that's comin' to the house at last!" he went on, with a solemn shake of his head, and no longer heeding his food. "It's always dhramin' o' silver I've been this last week, and that dhrame niver fails of throuble, ye know; an', more's the token, it's not three sprigs of sparemint I've seen in a dhrame since Barney Rooney's wake, a year ago last night—"

"Hark!" she interrupted, suddenly, laying her hand with a nervous grasp upon his arm; "that is his voice. I hear him calling you. Make haste—run! or he will suspect us!"

"Murdther, murdther! Howly Virgin presarve me!" he cried, jumping up with a pale and affrighted face, and trembling all over with this strange outburst of fear. "Heaven save me kindly! Was it indade his voice ye heard?"

"Yes; of course it was. There it is again! I do not see how you can mistake it!"

In her eagerness she caught hold of his shoulder to urge him toward the door. He seized her hands in his own stronger grip, and it startled her to feel how cold his fingers were. Then he sank into his chair, and great beads of perspiration began to start out upon his white forehead and whiter temples.

"Pat, Pat!" she said, alarmed, and trying to shake him out of the deathly stupor into which he was sinking,

"what is the matter? Certainly you are not afraid of him?"

"Afraid!" he hoarsely replied, turning on her such a horror-stricken face that she drew back a pace from him, herself seized with an undefined fear. "What mortal iver looked upon a ghost widout the fear o' God?"

He rapidly and devoutly crossed himself, murmuring snatches of his prayers.

"Why, Patrick Doyle!" she exclaimed, shaking him even more vigorously. "What is the matter with you? Who said anything about ghosts?"

"Yer own purty lips passed the word," he replied, with a groan. "Didn't ye tell me ye heard his voice?" with a shudder.

"Whose voice?" she asked, still perplexed.

"Shure, Barney Rooney's," he whispered, in a trembling tone.

"I never knew such a man, or even heard of him before you mentioned his name just now," she answered, beginning to smile.

"Ye didn't?" said Pat, recovering his self-possession as rapidly as he had lost it. "Thin it wasn't his ghost ye heard jist now?"

"A ghost's voice!" and she burst into a laugh, in which he slowly joined. "Better for us all if it were indeed the voice of a ghost. No, bless your superstitious soul! it was your master's voice, calling you. There it is again!"

There was no mistake in the earthliness of that voice as it came ringing around the corner, with clashing echoes from barn, house and wood-shed.

"Hear the loud clack o' him! Shure, he might be callin' the time o' day from the parish steeple wid that voice!"

Pat seized his hat to obey this very unwelcome summons.

"Pat," said the woman, detaining him an instant, with the soft pressure of her hand on his, that was now turning the knob of the door, "you will be our friend—not only mine, but hers?" glancing toward the other room. "You will not tell her what you saw last night, nor what was said to you this morning?"

He nodded assent. She went on :

"Thank you, Pat ! It is so kind of you to help us ! I see we can trust you to keep our secrets, and to stand by us in any trouble."

He laid his hand upon his breast. This was always his gesture when he spoke with deep feeling.

"Misthress Loyd," he said, with a voice that trembled with earnestness, "it's the fast friend of the two of ye I'll be to me dyin' day. Och hone !" raising his eyes, as full of sorrow as was the warning tone of his voice, "shure, the heart wud fairly break in me body if hurt or harm kem to ye. I'll watch over ye all—mind that ; an' if Mr. Silas Gagger—to give him the benefit of his full name—thinks he'll make meself a spy on ye, he'll find he's missed me like his mammy's blessin'."

Again came the angry calls of the voice at the barn.

"Arrah, hear the haste of him ! Does he take me fur a strake of lightnin' ? Indade, I wish I wor. I'd hit him this mornin' where it would take a moighty long time fur him to gain his natheral powers."

With a wise look at Aziel, and touching his lips in token of secrecy, he left the house, and ran toward the barn, shouting, as he ran,

"Och, millia murthur—wirasthrue ! is it shpakin' to me ye are, Misther Gagger ?"

CHAPTER XIV.

IN "THE LEGAL REFUGE."

OVER the door of a small frame building that stood near by the Green Tree Inn was a large white sign, with these black letters on it :

RADER CRAFT,
Counsellor-at-Law.

One would suppose that in the small and quiet village of Slowville there was little chance for a lawyer to gain

a visible means of support. But Slowville was inhabited by neither saints nor non-resistants. The people had those disputes and quarrels which are the outgrowth of human nature, be it primitive or educated, and law was as necessary to the peace of mind and progress of the Slowvilleites as it is to other communities larger and more aristocratic. As moralists claim that no evil in life is unaccompanied by a corresponding blessing, either apparent or hidden, so it had come to pass that Rader Craft, from his very first appearance in the town, had been looked upon in the light of a providential dispensation. If they must have a lawyer, said all the people, what better one could they have than Rader Craft, who, in addition to his knowledge of the law itself, was not only an honest man, but endeavored at all times to be a peacemaker, rather than a stirrer-up of strife? Such being his reputation—and he looked after his reputation as closely as he watched his fees—Rader Craft had succeeded in Slowville far beyond his expectations.

He had come into the village five years ago with little money in his pocket. So impecunious was he that he was obliged to begin a system of credit, without any other basis than the sign he nailed over his door and the genial face and happy manner with which he greeted his future clients; and the people trusted him. He knew they would. Who could resist his unctuous smile, or withstand the warm pressure of his great plump hand, which seemed to exude alike to friend and stranger the oil of human kindness? This morning, Rader Craft was seated in his office—to which he had given the name of "The Legal Refuge"—employed upon some important document on his table. Ordinarily he had a pen as ready as his tongue, but just now he seemed to proceed with great labor and indecision. His brows were knitted with the throes of literary effort, and he had no sooner written a line than he drew his pen through it and gave vent to a genuine sigh of despair. Now it was not Rader Craft's nature to despair of anything, however unattainable it might seem to others of a mental composition weaker than his own. A client might think his case hopeless, and be ready to abandon it at any stage of the legal pro-

ceedings; but the worse the case grew, the more hopeful became Rader Craft, until his honest beaming smile, increasing in radiance with every succeeding difficulty, would melt the heart of any jurymen who for a moment fell beneath its winning power.

The smile of Rader Craft! Why, it would outweigh the adverse charge of any judge in the circuit, it was such an honest, beneficent and entreating smile. This morning the smile seemed of no avail to contend with the difficulties he had encountered in writing so brief a composition as a few lines on a sheet of note-paper. And although he had been laboring diligently since his hurried breakfast at the Green Tree, yet he had got no farther than the address itself. To a superficial observer it would have seemed a very easy thing to write so brief an epistle, but to Rader Craft it was a harder task than any legal document that could be found in the book of forms that lay upon his desk. He put aside his pen with a gesture of contempt. Thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, he began to stride up and down the room, as was his wont when wishing to impress a jury with his complete confidence in his case.

"It is very strange," he muttered, "that I should be so suddenly at a loss to express myself. Of course there are a hundred ways to write the note; but then, again, there is only one way that is the best way. It will not do for me to be too confident. I must be winning, not presumptuous. My language should be vigorous with truth, frank in its confessions, and yet solicitous in its weakness and seductive in its hesitation. Egad! I wish I had a *Complete Letter-Writer!*"

As if this suggestion were an insult to his intelligence, he suddenly moved to his table, sat down again, and took up his pen with a dogged shake of his head. He was now silent for a long while. There was no sound in the room save his laborious breathing and the rapid sputtering of his pen, which wrote, scratched out and rewrote, until a dozen sheets of paper had been covered and pushed aside. Finally, he took a fresh sheet, and slowly copied upon it a sentence, here and there, from the pages he had written. This was quite a task, for he was a poor penman and a

worse speller, and was obliged to stop many times to consult his dictionary. At last his work was finished. Wiping the perspiration from his face, he lay back in his chair with a chuckle of satisfaction, and read, slowly and in a low tone, the following :

"THE LEGAL REFUGE, Thursday.

"MISS AZIEL LOYD: DEAR MADAM—The case which I now present to your consideration is one that should melt the stoutest heart. A gentleman has retained me in his behalf, and I submit to you his appeal, knowing that you will give a judgment dictated by your soul, than which God has created nothing more tender, nothing sweeter, nothing kinder, nothing more loving. Could this gentleman resist loving you? I ask the question, bluntly, it may be, to one so reserved and modest as yourself. Yet, how else could I present the case of one who has been charmed by your presence, ravished by your beauty, and now pines for your recognition? Do not, I entreat you, close those lovely eyes to such a worshiper. Give ear to his pleadings, and let his heart bound for joy as your lovely head bows to his appeal. One smile from your sweet lips would thrill his soul with the glories of another world, and the lightest touch of your fair hand would make him your happy prisoner for evermore. I will not yet divulge to you the name of your adorer. Suffice it at present to say that he is a gentleman of good social standing, fair abilities, ample means, and with a wealth of affection which to lavish on you would be his supreme delight, his greatest joy. Let your own dear heart guess, with no trepidation or fear of mistake, who is the slave of your beauty, the captive of your charms. You will meet him ere long, and should he place in your fair hands a spray of emblematic flowers, let them utter for him the warm words of his loving heart, and may his speechless love be his strongest appeal. Yours very truly,

RADER CRAFT, Counsellor-at-Law."

He had scarcely finished reading this specimen of amatory writing and laid it down upon the table, when there was a loud rap at the door, and Silas Gagger, without waiting for an answer to his summons, entered the room. The lawyer deftly threw a newspaper over what he had been writing and advanced to meet his guest, who by this time had deposited a well-filled carpet-bag upon the floor and seated himself.

"Ah! going on a journey, I see?" Craft said, pointing at the bag. "Well, nothing like a change of scene and air to revive exhausted nature, give new impetus to the springs of life and strength to the weary frame, and make the heart glad and the soul merry—"

"Fudge!" interrupted the old man, throwing out his hand in token of silence. "I didn't come here to hear a

Fourth-of-July oration. Are you alone? I want to see you on business."

"Correct! We will proceed to business without delay," rejoined Craft, suddenly dropping his elevated style of speech and seating himself in front of the other, bringing his face to close attention, though not without the beaming smile.

"Can you keep a secret for me?" asked Gagger, a scowl on his wrinkled face that heightened the glare in his eyes.

"This breast," rejoined the lawyer, tapping his bosom with a mysterious shake of his head, "is the repository of innumerable secrets. If I were to stand in the middle of yonder street and tell what I know, in less than an hour every family in Slowville would be divided against itself." Now do you ask me whether I can keep a secret?"

"I am going to Philadelphia, to stay a month or more, just as it suits me. I wish to leave you in charge of my house and wife while I am away."

The old man's scowl grew blacker, if that were possible.

"At your service, Mr. Gagger," said Craft with a deferential bow. "Whatever directions you leave shall be strictly followed."

"Would I leave directions unless I expected them to be followed?" snapped the other. "Don't interrupt me again, but answer my questions. Is a man obliged to live with his wife?"

"No; nor a wife with her husband."

"Humph! First time I ever heard that law and happiness were on the same side in married life," sneered the visitor.

"Law, sir, allow me to add," said Craft, with a look of offended dignity, "is the basis of human felicity; withdraw its protecting arms, and happiness would be banished from the world and society plunged into chaos."

"Yes; that's what I suppose the man said when he was hung," rejoined Gagger, his scowl softening into somewhat of a leer. "You lawyers have a strange way of making people happy. You provoke contests you cannot decide, and would not decide if you could—at least,

so long as your clients have money. I know you well. You are no better than the doctors, who poison a man trying to cure him, or the clergy, who raise more doubts in people's minds than they can ever settle. I tell you, Rader Craft, the world is governed by fraud instead of law."

Silas Gagger's cane came down upon the floor with a thump that startled even the placid listener.

"Well, well, we will not discuss at present the ethics of the professions. There are questions entering into the consideration of the subject which, viewed in the light—"

"That will do; we will dispense with your light, for it's the light of old, which was hid under a bushel. So the law does not compel a man to live with his wife?"

"No; but it compels him to support her. Nothing but a divorce from her, obtained by the husband on account of her adultery or desertion, can take away her right of maintenance by him."

"Humph! I might have known that your wonderful law is on the side of the woman, giving her all the advantage. A man gets no justice in this world with law and women against him!"

Gagger's cane beat an excited tattoo upon the floor, a faint reflex of the disgust upon his face.

"Woman, my dear sir, is the weaker party, and she risks more in marriage than the man does. Risking more than he, she should have the greater protection. He should at least be made to support her. And, sir," waxing a trifling eloquent as he stretched out his arms with a broad and sweeping gesture, "it is the glory of the law that it throws around the weakness of lovely woman a barrier that man, with all the wickedness and roughness of his nature, cannot break down. Yes, sir, to the glory of jurisprudence be it spoken, woman stands enshrined in the innermost sanctuary of the Temple of Justice!"

"Fudge!" exclaimed the other, with a snap of his fingers; "don't take me for some stupid jury. Laws were made to be broken, or there would be no employment for your profession. And, what is more, any law can be and is evaded, or there would be no use for lawyers of your stamp. I tell you, Rader Craft, you might as well give up

trying to deceive me ; I can read you, and it's not very hard to do it."

"Indeed ! What do you read ? I have been intending for some time to have a phrenologist give me an index of my character. Perhaps you can save me the expense, and do the job even better than he."

The lawyer smiled most graciously, and assumed an attitude of respectful attention.

"You would take any case, provided it was brought to you with money. Am I right?"

"Yes ; for it is my duty as a lawyer to undertake any and every case. I am bound, by the very ethics of my profession, to protect the guilty and defend the innocent. It is my noble prerogative, sir, to see that the criminal receives no more than his just punishment, and the innocent no punishment at all. Do you comprehend the fine distinction included in these two propositions?"

"Yes ; and I see the loopholes within for the escape of your virtue ; for a lawyer's virtue is like the balance of electricity—least on the side where it is most needed."

"In plain words, then, you believe that I, representing at present the most honorable of all the professions, would do anything for money in my professional line ? That, I take it, my friend, is your very complimentary opinion of the profession in general and myself in particular?"

"Yes ; and I will prove it," went on the other with a cunning look as he took from his pocket five ten-dollar gold-pieces and laid them on the table. "There are fifty dollars. They represent a small portion of the value of the information I wish to get—suspicious," in a lower tone, "I want confirmed. You are the man to do the work. Am I mistaken?"

"Explain yourself more fully," was the reply, as the smile on the lawyer's face grew softly bland, losing the touch of derision that had crept into it a moment before.

"I will. Do you remember the conversation we had in this very room five years ago?"

"Yes ; perfectly well. It was about your marriage with the *widow* Slade," laying particular stress on the word "*widow*."

Gagger was quick to detect the emphasis on this word,

and, with a little start, he bent his eyes with a questioning and scrutinizing glance upon his companion.

The other made no response beyond the steadiness of his genial smile and a posture of closer attention.

"Do you remember you told me that I would grow tired of married life—that my habits were too fixed—that I was too old to marry—and that, if I were to marry, I should wed as nearly as I could one of my own age?"

"Yes, I gave you that advice. It was advice founded on my own observation and the experience of others. It was good advice then—is good advice now—to any one similarly situated, and will be until the end of time. There are exceptions to every rule, but the general truth in this particular relation remains the same—old men should not marry young women. Such a union involves risks against which human nature has no insurance. Have you discovered the truth or the falsity of my predictions?"

"The truth," growled Gagger with a violent rap of his cane. "What an old ass I was not to take your advice! If I had known you as well then as I do now, I would have done so. You understand women better than I do. I will say that much in your praise, even if you are a lawyer."

"I am obliged to you for the compliment, although it comes so unwillingly," said the lawyer, his smile giving way, for the instant, to a look of modest satisfaction. "So you cannot live together harmoniously? Too bad! I should judge you were a very easy man to deal with in any relation of life. To be sure, you have your peculiarities, but which of us has not? But of what avail is it for a man to have the disposition of a saint if he is yoked to a woman who is never pleased with anything he does or says?"

"True, true," muttered Gagger, leaning his elbows on his knees and resuming with his cane the tattoo on the floor. "You are stating my case exactly. You are a deep man, Rader Craft—very deep."

"Yes; I can see it all, as well as if I had been living with you these last five years of your experiment. You married for love—"

Gagger raised his head suddenly and threw out his hand with a gesture of disgust as expressive as that which had come to his face.

"Don't dwell on that portion of the case," he muttered. "I was a fool! I did not know what I was doing. Love? Bah! It was an old man's silliness, his folly, his stupidity!"

"Well, then," resumed the other, "we will not discuss why you married. But it is evident that the widow married you for your money. Now, now, be calm!" for the old man, at these words, began to turn himself about excitedly in his chair. "I am only giving you the same opinion I did five years ago; and you must acknowledge I tried to do you a good service then in insisting upon your getting her to sign away her right of dower before the marriage."

"Yes. And what a blind old idiot I was not to have seen through her then and taken your advice!"

"Exactly so. But having taken your own way, and found it a wrong one, I presume you will more readily listen to me now. I think you said you had suspicions. What are they? Is it possible"—in a voice low, tremulous and intensely dramatic—"that you have suspicions of the truth of my suggestion to you, that the *widow* Slade was—not—a—widow?"

"Well, suppose she were not, what help could it be to me now?"

Gagger, keeping his eyes on the floor, effectually concealed, as he thought, the agitation which these words had caused him, for now they were touching for the first time the main object of his coming here this morning.

"No help, unless you can prove her former husband to be still living; and none then, unless you are willing to pay him to take her off your hands. For taking her back or leaving her with you is wholly at his option. I guess, though, you wouldn't object to a nice little sum for that purpose. It's not often a man can get rid of his wife so easily in a legal manner."

The lawyer shook his head very significantly, and let a trifle of cunning slip into the blandness of his smile.

The visitor quickly raised his head. No use to try

to conceal his surprise. What he had heard suggested a train of thought that was entirely new, and as alarming to him as it was unexpected.

That he might have to pay the former husband to take his wife back was a proposition that made the perspiration start out at every pore. If this were so, he was at the mercy of the former husband, who might also be in league with his wife. If they should combine against him, what escape would he have from their mercenary schemes? They could play upon him and rob him at will.

"I see my words have not only surprised but startled you," said the lawyer, as his companion sat dazed, wiping his face with a trembling hand, that plainly told, even better than his scared countenance, how some undefined fear had seized upon him. "It is always best—and most professional as well—that a client should learn at the first the worst view of his case. Forewarned is forearmed, in law as well as war. Let me explain to you the exact legal status of the whole affair. If Slade, the former husband of the supposed widow whom you married, should come to life again—and it is not an improbability, as I suggested to you five years since—he would have the option of claiming his wife or not within six months after his return or reappearance. If he should claim her, the court would, on his application, dissolve your marriage. If, on the other hand, he should prefer you to keep her, he has only to let affairs remain as they are. So you see the advantage is wholly on the side of Slade. He can give or take just as he chooses."

"Confound the law!" muttered Gagger, leaning back in his chair with a gasp of despair. "It's always on the side of villainy. Here I am, an old man, who is either to be hectorred to death by my wife or robbed by this scoundrel of a former husband, who can choose which it shall be. It's too bad—it's cruel, it's downright infamous!"

Grasping his cane with a vicious look, he pounded the floor, with a vigorous oath at every blow, while the lawyer smiled blandly and waited for the storm of wrath to subside.

"Why don't you speak? Why don't you advise me?" roared Gagger, looking up, and becoming more exasperated by the cool silence of his companion. "Why do you sit there gloating over my misery? Why don't you show me the law that protects the innocent? You were talking about protection fast enough a moment ago. Are you going to see me robbed of my hard earnings or worried to death by the worst shrew that ever cursed a man's house?"

"There, there! my friend! Calm yourself. There is no necessity for such a display of temper. You have only heard the worst side of your case. Now listen to the other, and when you have heard it I think you will assent to my former proposition—that a lawyer can protect the innocent. First, let me thoroughly understand your wishes in this matter. You want to get rid of this wife?"

"Of course I do," growled the other. "Do you think I am the same idiot I was when I married her?"

"I will reserve my opinion on that point until I see the result of this interview," was the half-serious, half-bantering reply. "Now answer me one question, and on your answer depends the whole decision of the case. Suppose," laying his hand with an impressive gesture on the other's arm, and throwing into his countenance a mysterious look very suggestive of some hidden knowledge, "I should be able to find this Slade, and induce him for a consideration—a money-consideration, you understand—to take his wife off your hands. What would such a favorable solution of this very complicated and harassing affair be worth to you?"

"Have you any suspicions as to where the man is?" asked the other, suddenly assuming a confidential, coaxing tone entirely foreign to his manner, and drawing nearer the lawyer. "Have you heard anything lately? Have you seen anybody? Come, Craft, answer me. I see it in your face; you cannot deceive me."

"No, and you cannot deceive me," the bland smile dissolving into the trifle of a laugh. "I see what you are at. The idea has suddenly suggested itself to you to treat directly with this man if he can be found. You think you can make him take a smaller sum than I would men-

tion as his price if you employed me as your agent in the matter. Come now, don't deny it. Acknowledge that your avarice is getting the better of your judgment. You have driven sharp bargains in your life, and you think that here is a chance for the sharpest bargain of all. Try it, if you choose. You will find yourself woefully mistaken in your belief that you can work yourself out of this difficulty at a small expense."

The lawyer's hand made a broad sweep as if resigning the case, while the bland smile was blander than ever.

"I see you hesitate about altogether dispensing with my services," resumed Craft as the other sat silent, twirling his cane between his hands, his eyes fixed upon the floor. "Suppose we start out in this way: I am—if it be possible—to find the man, and get him to state the price at which he is willing to relieve you of his wife. I will submit his offer to you, and you can then decide upon its acceptance or rejection. I, of course, am to impress upon him that while you prefer to resume your single life, you are not so anxious to do so as to pay him any large sum for his aid in the matter. How does that suit you?"

"I am agreed," said Gagger, after a long pause and with something like a sigh of relief as he answered. "Now tell me, Craft, since we have come to an understanding, how you are going to proceed. What do you know about this man Slade? Has he turned up, and do you know where he is?"

"Are you going to Philadelphia to-day?" asked Craft, turning in his seat and beginning to pick up the gold-pieces from the table.

"Yes—in the noon train."

"Then you have not much time to spare," looking at his watch. "Where are you going to stay?"

The number of the house and name of the street were given, and the lawyer wrote them down in his memorandum-book—an unusually large volume for the purpose—among whose leaves he sought, with evident trouble, for a blank page upon which to make the entry.

"I declare," he said, looking at the book with great satisfaction as he closed its leaves, "the memorandums of important cases in this diary make me really proud of my-

self. But success is a fair extenuation of self-glorification. I little dreamed five years ago that I would stand at the head of the bar of Lycoming County. By the by, friend Gagger, you spoke about leaving me in charge of your house and wife while you are away. Excuse my haste," assuming an air of restlessness and looking at his watch, "but I have an engagement here by appointment with a client, and the sooner we arrange matters the less danger of interruption. If I am not mistaken in my surmises, you wish me to give your wife each week a certain sum for household expenses. Am I correct?"

"Yes," nodded the other, slowly drawing out a pocket-book shiny and black with age. "Here are twenty dollars. Give her five dollars a week until you hear from me to the contrary. Mind, now, not a cent more!"

"Not a sum to warrant extravagance on her part," smiled the lawyer, taking the money and dropping it piece by piece into his own pocket, every jingle sending a momentary thrill of sadness through the donor's heart.

"I am not so sure of that," growled the old man. "After paying the woman Aziel one dollar, and Pat a dollar and a half, she will have two dollars and a half left, which is more a week than any economical woman ought to have when the house is stocked with vegetables and salt meats. I used to live on half of that sum before I was married."

"Just as you say," replied Craft with his deferential smile. "You understand the science of domestic economy better than I do. Now, to hurry on with our business, I suppose you wish me to keep an eye on the house, and report anything unusual—any strange visitors, any little domestic affair out of the usual routine? Not that either of us has any suspicions, my dear sir," laying his hand on his companion's shoulder with a very significant look that deepened the cunning of his smile, "but we simply conclude that, during your absence, a little professional oversight on my part, a moderate amount of guardianship, would not be amiss."

The other fully comprehended him, and yet, restraining all evidence of the malicious hopes that stirred his breast, he said,

"There is no necessity for me to say another word. I see you understand me perfectly. Craft, you are a deep fellow—very deep—and worthy of your name. Good-bye!" shaking his hand, and turning to the valise, which he picked up, and then started toward the door. "Remember, Craft, if you manage this affair well for me you will be a richer man than you are now."

With a wink that made his face grotesquely humorous Silas Gagger made a sudden exit, for just at that instant his ear had caught the dull whistle of the approaching train. After he had gone the lawyer sat down in his chair and gave himself up to silent joy as this grand opportunity to better his fortune spread itself, with a fascinating clearness, before him. Rubbing his fat hands together, and exulting so heartily that his face seemed unable to contain another jot of such teeming joy, he ejaculated,

"Rader Craft! Rader Craft! you lucky man! Ay, ay, most noble Roman, thy star of destiny has at last arisen, and shines brightly in the eastern sky. Fortune hovers over you, and love leads the way."

A few moments later he had merrily sealed and directed the note which had cost him so much labor, and, secreting it with a fond gesture next to his heart, he went out in search of Dibbs, the presiding genius of the bar at the Green Tree Inn. Dibbs should be the shrewd messenger to carry this loving epistle. Dibbs, too, should be his right-hand man, his detective, in fact, to play the spy upon the inmates of the farm-house and the mysterious stranger—Slade, no doubt, as he already believed the man to be, from what Dibbs had told him—who he was sure would soon reappear in Slowville.

CHAPTER XV.

VOICES IN THE AUTUMN WOODS.

THE girl, carrying back the token her lover had given her, did not let it rest long in her pocket, where the old man had thrust it; nor did she go far upon her way

with the quick footsteps with which, in responsive obedience to her father's injunction of haste, she had left the cottage-door and hurried down the garden-path. Already clasped in her hand, the locket was pressed upon her bosom, and—odd coincidence indeed—over her very heart, where Volney had bidden her always to wear it. And now, with the slow, uncertain tread of one who doubts the best and fears the worst, she was approaching the willow copse, although it did not lie in her direct path, and was a place which one would think that just now she would have shunned. She stopped an instant, with a movement of hesitation; then audibly wishing, with many a heavy sigh, that she might avoid this sad spot, where her lover had left her in anger, she went straight on toward it, with that perversity of real love which so often seeks the very means of increasing its unhappiness. She thought she must be crying now, there was such a mist in her eyes, and she felt such a great, swelling lump surging up in her throat. Throwing out her hands gropingly against the willow branches, she parted them, and passed into the enclosure. For a moment she stood motionless, her head upon her breast, which, agitated by apprehensions she could not define, rose and fell with the rapid beating of her heart.

At last she raised her glistening eyes and cast a swift glance about her. The spot where he had stood was more luminous than all the rest, and on it her eyes fell with a peculiar and peaceful sadness. For how doubly dear to her now was this place! Here they first had met—he with smiles and she with blushes; and here they last had parted—she with tears and he with frowns. “Parted? Yes, parted—perhaps for ev—” She did not finish the word. It trembled, half pronounced, upon her quivering lip, and then died away in silence. No, no! she would not, could not, believe they had parted for ever. She would not despair of seeing him again. How or when she knew not, any more than she could tell why she loved him. Loved him! How her heart fluttered with this thought, and then sent it thrilling along her nerves, until she feared that her hot cheeks would betray her happy secret to the brook that glimmered at her through the branches at her feet! Loved him, when he had been so

unkind to her? No, not unkind; it was only a little impatient that he was. He had been deceived by her own foolish hesitation. He did not understand what she meant; and how could he, when she had told him nothing?

"Poor Volney!" she murmured, uttering his name more tenderly than she had ever spoken it save in her dreams. "How cruel I was to him, to make him so angry—to hurt his feelings so!" Thus bewailing her ungenerous treatment of him, she burst into a flood of penitent tears.

Weeping as she went, she left the willow copse, passing through the same opening by which he had departed. She crossed the brook too, spreading just here into a wider and shallower stream, stepping on the very stones she was sure his feet must have touched; and into the woods she went, along the path that skirted their edge. He must have trodden this path this very morning, for whose footsteps but his would Cæsar trace with such joy as he bounded along before her, scattering the leaves that lay in his way and waking the woodland echoes with his happy barking? She called the dog to her and chided him for his merri-ment. Laying her hand upon his great broad forehead, she regarded him with a sad shake of her head, and said to him, with trembling voice,

"Cæsar, you dear, good soul! you would not be so happy if you only knew how sad I am, and what makes me so. But I cannot tell you now, Cæsar," with a little gush of tears; "so you must walk beside me, and keep very quiet—that's a dear, good dog," stooping down and caressing him.

They went on together now in silence, she slightly ahead of her pet, who followed his mistress with half-dejected head, as if he had already made her trouble a matter of serious reflection, and decided, if possible, he would find her a way out of it. How bright the woods were, with the witching charm and rich variety of Autumn, who, like some monarch, seemed to be moving across the landscape, followed by an Orient army with blazing banners, glittering shields of silver and gold, and all the gorgeous pageantry of Eastern splendor! How

brilliant were the trees, as if the departed beauty of the summer's sunset had been distilled into leaf and twig and branch! What glowing hues of crimson and scarlet and gold! The rainbow itself, falling upon the forest, could have left no brighter colors there. The trees, bathed in the light of the noonday sun, shone like pillars of fire, or glowed like the red robes of royalty, or flashed like banners of Persian cloth of gold. Amid all this beauty of brilliant gorgeous coloring, far more exquisite than the forest had presented in its fresh, green summer life, when those leaves had laughed in the sunbeams and sung in the breezes, wooing sunlight and shadow alike,—amid all this splendor, which blazed along the tree-tops and flashed here and there from bush and flower and lowly plant, the girl walked, with head dejected and eyes fixed upon the ground. She saw only the fallen, faded and sombre leaves as they rustled across her path, strewn thickly with these relics of a happy summer-time. It was not the rollicking breezes she heard now in the high tree-tops, that playfully nodded their heads to the bright blue sky, but, instead, upon her ear fell the moaning of the bleak wind, as it hastened, with a ghastly shudder, through the waning woods, as if it too—for the girl had now quickened her pace—could not bear to linger amid this sorrowful decay of Nature's summer glories. So on swept the moaning wind, and on sped the unhappy girl; and yet the wind came back again to linger in the gloomy forest, and so did the maiden's thoughts ever return to the one sorrow of her heart, as if, indeed, there were some hidden joy in her grief, some enjoyment even in her sadness. Silently pursuing her way along the margin of the brook, whose gentle trills and melancholy murmurs kept rhythmical cadence to her fainting hopes and growing fears, she came at length out of the woods of chestnut, oak and maple, of sumac and dogwood, and found herself on the edge of the little pine grove that skirted the Gagger farm—the little pine grove which she had so often longed to see, for was it not there that her lover had told her he had spent many happy hours in thinking and dreaming of her? It was a place for dreaming or for loving, or for dreaming of the loving and the loved. How serene was the silence! how

hallowed the stillness that floated on the dim, slumberous air!—the air, laden with its fragment balsam, which stole upon the senses like an all-pervading opiate to lull the soul to happiest dreams! Ah, here might the weary and the careworn, and the spirit of unrest itself, find peace at last! Here can never come the harsh sounds of busy human toil and strifes; here are hushed even the dreamy murmurs of the woodland life. Neither song of bird nor hum of insect vibrates on the expectant hush that fills the air. It is as if Nature herself, drawing apart a while from all her other works, knelt here in silent prayer.

The girl grew calmer herself as she stood rapt in contemplation of the scene. Numberless vague but sweet associations and memories of the past stole over the tumult of her soul. Soon she felt that subtle charm pervading heart and brain, that refreshment of soul which ever comes to one alone with Nature or with Nature's God, and hope again touched with a gentle smile her cheek and brow. Ere long she started with a little cry of joy, for, as she had gone on farther into the recesses of these beckoning pines, her eyes had caught sight of a clearing just beyond. Suddenly, impelled by an influence she could not resist, she darted across the soft turf, that scarcely bent beneath her light, flying feet, and in another moment was kneeling, with happy though tearful eyes, beside the rustic seat, the beechwood chair, his hands had fashioned. It stood only a few paces from the brook, at the foot of an old gnarled pine whose trunk was seamed with the red of many vanished summers. This ancient tree was covered here and there with streaming tufts of gray lichen, while wild flowers, growing at its base, seemed like this maiden here—unconscious loveliness at the feet of unobservant age. So this was his retreat, his place to think on her alone! she thought, surveying it with tender and timorous glance. This, then, was where he told her he had sat for hours, hearkening to her laugh in yonder brook, seeing her face in the flowers, her smile in the sunshine, and listening, enchanted, to her voice in the zephyr's soft sighing!

Now she also remembered, as a stray tear stole away from her lashes, that he had said he had cut their initials

somewhere on the trunk of this pine tree—cut them, he had laughingly declared, in large, broad and deep letters, so that the growing bark could not blot them out in many, many years—cut them on the southern side, where the sun might always shine upon these letters, as he hoped fortune would some day shine upon themselves. Where was the sunny side of this rough and grizzled tree, which looked as if it cared for neither sun nor light, darkness nor tempest, and could carry for ever a love-secret in its silent and sturdy bosom? The girl rose slowly to her feet and gazed upward with eager, questioning eyes, which had a trace of happiness in their search. No, the letters were not here; besides, this was the shady side. This she knew from the signs learned from her father. This thicker and rougher bark, and these thick gray lichens, grew always on the northern side of pines and other trees, to protect them from the bleak winds and piercing storms that winter brought from the frigid climes of the North. Slowly, and with upturned, curious eyes, she now passed around to the other side of the tree, where streams of sunlight fell flashing through the dusky foliage above. In another instant she had clasped her hands with a little cry of joy, and was looking up with transfixed and beaming eyes.

There they were, as plain to her as the letters upon the locket. High up he had cut them, where no rude hand could touch them, no curious eye pry into the loving mystery of their entwining. Ah, how clearly she made them out, despite their elevation! How readily she comprehended, with alternating blush and gentle sigh, the design, so natural, in which he had wrought them—a large “V” with a small “E” within its arms; and a large “S” with a miniature “G” enclosed in each of its curves. What could be more typical of a strong and earnest love? What more suggestive of its constant guardianship, its tender care, its all-embracing solicitude? And he had loved her in this way—had loved her! The girl could not see the letters now. They had faded out in the gathering haze of her eyes—blurred out of sight at last. She sank down upon the ground, and, with her face buried in her hands, gave full vent to her tears, as she rocked to and fro, and let her heart take complete possession of her

thoughts. All she could think of just now was how much she loved him. No matter if he had been unkind to her this morning, she loved him still, and loved him all the more. Nor did she once ask herself whence or why this all-pervading feeling of her soul. It was joy enough—question and answer enough—for her to know that he was never so dear to her as now. Nor could she remember when she had not loved him. It seemed to her as if she had always loved Volney. Loved him! Her life had been the happiness of living only worth remembering since they had met. Ah, the few short hours of their meetings, far too rare, were to her now years of happiness that bathed her past in a glorious light, and fell upon her future with a mellow radiance that time, she knew, could not dispel nor dim at all. Loved him! She was weeping fast now, for she was holding the locket pressed to her lips, covering it with passionate kisses, as if her heart would break were it not for the caressing of this treasure, which, even with him gone away in anger, brought him now so nigh. Ah! was he not always near her? Could she ever forget him for a single second in the long and weary days to come? Though she might never see him again, would or could his image ever lose one atom of the clearness with which it glowed in every fibre of her heart?

While thus deeply absorbed she sat, asking herself these and many other questions which called out more and more the full, strong feeling of her attachment, she was startled by a sudden growl from Cæsar, and, listening, she heard the sound of footsteps. Quickly turning and looking in the direction of the brook, she saw a woman crossing it—a female dressed in black, of medium height and figure. She had never before seen this woman, the girl knew full well, as the figure came closer and the resolute pale face stood out clear in the sunlight. Yet the stranger now advanced with a look of semi-recognition, and an expression, too, of friendliness. Emily, on the instant she had espied this new-comer, had hastily put the locket out of sight, hiding it in her bosom. Then, rising to her feet in no little alarm, she pushed back the hair that had strayed from beneath her faded hood

and fixed her timid eyes upon the stranger. Now, growing each instant less fearful, yet agitated by the sudden hope that this might be Volney's mother, she stood with one hand pressed against the tree and the other resting on Cæsar's head, waiting, with half-drawn breath, the nearer approach of the woman, who still came on, and with a reassuring smile upon her face. Odd to relate, Cæsar, contrary to his usual manner with strangers, gave evident signs of his approval of this new acquaintance. He wagged his tail, threw up his nose with several sniffs of satisfaction, and ended his demonstrations with a growl of content and a composing shake of his massive frame, which he now laid down at the feet of his mistress, fixing his eyes with rapid alternation on her and the figure so close at hand.

Aziel Loyd—for she the woman was—stopping but a pace or two away, spoke to Emily in a voice as reassuring as her smile had been, which was now transformed into a look of admiration, quickly succeeded by an expression of pity, for she saw in the eyes and cheeks of the girl plain traces of her recent tears.

"Do not be alarmed at seeing me," she said. "I had no idea of meeting any one here, and you, indeed, least of all. I was on my way to the village, and to make a short cut was coming through these woods. But why, my child, are you here, so far away from your home? I thought your father never allowed you to go out of his sight?"

"I am on my way to the farm-house yonder," she replied, hesitatingly, with a bashful inclination of her head. "I have an errand there for my father." Then, as if she had taken sudden courage from the pleasant face that was bent over her, she asked, raising her own with a timid yet an unspeakable yearning in it, "Are—are you his mother?"

Before the other could reply, Emily, frightened by the boldness of her question, had again drooped her head to hide the chiding blushes that burned upon her cheeks. But the woman did not answer quickly. A white look, as the girl spoke these words, had come into her face—a scared look springing quickly there—to conceal which

she turned away her head for an instant; and as she turned her head, her hand, with a movement evidently unconscious, groped with a nervous, clutching motion about her heart. But only a second did she stand thus, for now, turning to her companion with face again composed, she said, gently caressing the other's shoulder,

"So you are on your way to see his mother? I know what you mean by *his*," she went on with a grave smile. "You mean one who is dearer to me than all else the world could give me—so dear, indeed," her voice trembling, "that I doubt if even you are dearer to him than he is to me. Yet," surveying with a look of unrestrained admiration the graceful figure and lovely features of the girl, who had crept closer to her, "I cannot blame him for loving you. You are very handsome, child, and good besides: that I can read in this sweet face. You will let me love you too, for his sake?" tenderly kissing her.

For answer the girl hid her face on the other's bosom, and wept a moment in glad surprise; for, next to the joy of his loving her, what affection could be more grateful to her soul than that of his mother, whom until now she had feared would never care for her?

"I am so glad, so happy, that you love me!" she managed to say at last, looking up into the other's face through her joyful tears. "He told me you might not love me much at first, but that you would love me some time almost as much as you love him."

"So I will," the woman said, pressing the upturned, pleading face to her heart. "But tell me, what is your errand? It must be important, else your father would not send you so far alone. When I came here I found you crying; so I can guess this much—that your errand is not a pleasant one to you. Come, you must let me be your friend. Sit down here," leading her to the rustic seat. "There is room enough for both of us. Now, while I have my arm about you so, you must tell me not only your errand, but all about your troubles—for troubles you have, I am sure—and perhaps I can be of service to you in some way. I am a good hand, I assure you, to assist people in their distress—at least," with a

sigh, "I can help them to bear misfortune, if I can do nothing to rid them of it."

The other made no reply just yet, but the woman, as she was speaking, had felt the girl nestling nearer to her, pillowing her head closely upon her bosom, and clinging with a firmer pressure of her two palms to the other's hand that rested in her lap. And now, silence ensuing, she was greatly agitated, as if by some mental conflict, apparently wishing to speak to her companion and unburden her soul, but still hesitating to open her lips—in fact, without the power just now to do so, so great a fear of her father had come suddenly upon her.

"Poor child!" murmured the other, softly kissing the fair forehead that drooped upon her bosom, "do not be afraid to tell me all you wish. I will ask you no questions. You shall say to me just as much or just as little as you like. Any secret you may choose to tell me shall be as safe with me as if it were my own. Poor, dear child!" she went on musingly, the caress of her arm tightening, while the girl kept tremblingly silent; "he told me you had neither mother nor sister. I will be both to you, if you only will let me. I will counsel you and guide you in all those things where a mother's love and care are always needed; and surely you need them both in your strange life. In me, too, you can confide all the little secrets that sisters love to dwell upon. Come," she gently entreated, smiling encouragingly, "do not shut your heart against me. Let me be your friend—let me freely love you as if you were a child of mine!"

Emily, deeply affected by the woman's sympathy, could no longer resist its magnetic power, despite her promise to her father to repeat only what he had said, and, notwithstanding her resolution and her effort to keep that promise, she failed now of obedience. Taking the locket from her bosom and pressing it into the woman's hand with a burst of tears, she went on, with a broken voice and words that eagerly crowded one another for utterance. She told the story of the locket, as well as that of her parting with her lover. Then, as if this outpouring of her confidence had somewhat soothed her agitation, she said in a calmer voice, her eyes fixed upon the locket,

which her hand still fondled as it lay in the other's palm,

"When you give him this locket, you will tell him that I—I—"

She broke down here, but the woman caught the sentence up, and cheerily said,

"Yes, yes! you can rest assured I shall tell him that you love him just as much as ever, unreasonable as he was with you—the foolish boy! But don't you remember or mind his little burst of jealousy. It's all over now, I warrant, and he is soundly accusing himself for it. Lover-like, he will not keep this locket long, I am certain. He'll be back here soon enough to beg your pardon and beseech you to take the locket again. When he learns, as I shall tell him, how constant you are in spite of the way in which he has treated you, his love will become all the stronger—perfect idolatry, in fact;" and the woman with a merry laugh caught the fair face, so bright and happy at these words, in her two hands, and kissed the lips that quickly kissed her back again with the impulsive affection of a child.

Cæsar, who during this conversation had been wandering with an uneasy motion around the tree, now suddenly became very demonstrative. As if impatient of further delay, he ran back and forth on the path they had come, and then, with a low, whining growl, he seized in his teeth the gown of his mistress and gently pulled upon it.

"What is the matter with him? Does he hear anybody?" asked Aziel, hastily glancing around and starting from her seat, while a scared look, like that she bore a while ago, came into her face.

"No," rejoined Emily, quickly rising and drawing her shawl closer about her and her hood farther over her face; "it's only his way of telling me that it is time for us to go home. Dear, good Cæsar!" patting him; "it's strange how much he seems to know. He thinks a great deal, I am sure, and he talks too, so that I can understand him; don't you, Cæsar?"

"He evidently knows that you are in his keeping," said the woman, eying him askance; "and I am sure you

could be with no safer guardian wherever you might go. But I will keep you no longer," embracing and kissing her; "and as it is better that neither your father nor any one else should see us together now, I will wait here until you are out of sight or nearly home, when I will go on my way to the village. Of our conversation this morning tell your father whatever you think best. Remember this—that if ever you should want a friend always ready and anxious to help you, you will find a warm welcome from me, day or night, at the farm-house yonder."

A kiss, an embrace, a parting look, and they had separated, the girl with light step speeding through the checkered shadows of the trees, the woman looking after her with a sad and loving expression.

"I could not undeceive her," murmured Aziel Loyd, with a heavy sigh. "Well, let her think I am his mother. What harm is there in that to her? Certainly none to him. Indeed, is it not all the better for the happiness of them both that I should keep the locket for him, and tell him myself what she was saying here? How else, I wonder, would he ever get the one or hear the other? Not from Mrs. Gagger, I know, who ere this would have sent the poor child back to her home in bitter tears."

With this resolution, and trusting to chance and her own adroitness to carry on the deception to a successful issue, Aziel went slowly on her way through the woods. Her brain was so busy scheming and plotting as she walked that she did not notice, as she reached the outskirts of the forest, a man who evidently had been watching her approach, and now came directly toward her. No need for him to come nearer for her recognition. Before he had raised his hand in token of silence—the hand upon which shone the jeweled finger—she knew him well, and had pressed her hand upon her lips to stifle the cry of surprise that came to them on meeting so unexpectedly, face to face, the man whose evil purposes she had set about, this very morning, to bring to naught if possible.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT THE BIRDS MIGHT HAVE HEARD.

WHILE the woman stood half shrinking in his pathway, trying to recover her self-possession, and to face the man with something of the calmness she felt was necessary, in her manner at least, he came closer, with a confident air and a smile of familiarity not less suggestive than the touch with which he laid his hand upon her arm and spoke.

"Surprised to see me here, aren't you? Thought you were rid of me for a week at least?" he said with a little mocking laugh, bending his crafty eyes so close to her face that she could not help recoiling from him. "You are still a trifle afraid of me, I see. But pshaw, Aziel!" his voice suddenly changing to a tone at once confidential and insinuating; "you have no good reason to fear me. On the contrary, our interests are still, as they have always been, mutual, if you would only have them so. You and I can always get along together, Aziel. There is no need for us to quarrel or work against each other. Come, don't look so distrustful of me. Let us shake hands; let us be friends, now and always."

With an effort of strength she managed to put out her trembling hand, but she could not, try ever so hard, look up at him now, so white with dismay as she knew her face was. Be in a friendly compact with him now and always! Leagued with him against all she held dear in life! The thought made her shudder, and her heart flutter with a motion almost motionless.

"Come, we will sit down yonder and talk a while," he resumed, affecting not to notice her trepidation, and pointing to a fallen stump near by. "Don't be afraid of being seen with me. We are safe enough from observation should anybody chance to go along the road."

He led her, half inclined to break away from him and flee the spot, to the seat, when he gently pushed her down upon it. Then, taking his own position close beside her, he caught up a withered branch from the ground, and

slowly snapping off its twigs one by one, he said, turning upon her a quizzical look,

"You have had an exciting time up at the farm-house this morning—the old man gone, the young man cleared out, and, I guess, His Satanic Majesty let loose generally. How does Mrs. Slade that was survive such a sudden and unexpected wreck of earthly affections? Feels as bad about the old man's going away, I suppose, as she did when she heard I was drowned in the Pacific."

Then he chuckled, and breaking the now twigless branch into pieces, he threw them at a little bird twittering on a bush near at hand. If the woman had been surprised at meeting him here in the woods, she certainly was more so to hear him tell her what had so recently occurred at the farm-house. And so busy was her mind asking the question when and how and where he could have gained this information that she made him no reply.

"You are wondering how I know all this," he said with a wink and a cunning shake of his head. "You certainly have not forgotten my old ability to ferret out secrets? If I remember rightly, you and she were never able to hide anything from me in those good old times when we all sat under the same vine and fig tree, as the poet says. Now, don't look so distressed, I beg of you! Those good old times may come again. Who knows?" chuckling again. "A man ought not to lie seven years in the Pacific Ocean, and then get not only a cheerless but a scornful welcome as soon as he comes back to life. The sorrowing friends ought to pay a warmer tribute to the reviving corpse. Well, well!" he went on with a mocking sigh, flinging up his hands with a little gesture of pity; "moral worth is ever slighted in this mercenary world, and affections so called cease with the last nail in the coffin-lid. Alas, alas! We had better change the subject, Aziel, and talk of business. So my worthy successor to Mrs. Slade's affections—that beautiful anatomical specimen of old age she has taken for a husband—has gone away this morning in a huff, has he? Took his carpet-bag with him, too. That looks as if he were going to be absent a while. Fine antique carpet-bag that—in size a small section of Noah's ark; and it

corresponded so well with his clothes—those relics of the flood. Generous man, I should say; saves money on himself to give it away to others. Ah! the missionary cause would suffer if he died. Eh, Aziel?”

“He is a very close and very saving man,” she said at length, after quite a pause, during which she had been looking sideways at him in mute bewilderment.

How had he learned so much in so short a time? His knowledge of affairs which had so lately and so secretly transpired must have been gained, she argued, by some supernatural means, unless, indeed, he had learned these secrets in the only other way possible—namely, by talking with Mr. Gagger himself; and in regard to this latter alternative she quickly resolved to satisfy herself at once.

“Did you have any conversation with him this morning?” she asked with a forced steadiness in her tone, and apparently busy in readjusting the folds of her shawl, that had just now conveniently fallen away from her shoulders.

“I thought you would ask me that question. Ah, Aziel, you are a quiet little soul, but you are deep: I always said that. Well, in this particular case, I don’t mind telling you the truth. No; I have not spoken a word this morning to that saintly old soul, though I was within twenty feet of him as he passed along the road yonder,” pointing over his shoulder in the direction of the highway. “On the contrary, I absolutely refused an introduction to him last evening.”

“You did?” she exclaimed under her breath, her astonishment increasing.

“Yes. As I was leaving your lane last night—that is, the lane leading to the farm-house, where I had the pleasure of renewing my acquaintance with you and Mrs. Slade that was—he caught a glimpse of me and called to me to stop; but,” with a comical roll of his eye, “considerations entirely personal to myself induced me not to respond to his pressing invitation to remain for an introduction. I preferred to make his acquaintance at a later period. Perhaps you will introduce me when it shall suit me best to meet him. Now, don’t turn so pale and look so anxious at a little joke like that. As I said before,

you and I can work together in this business—compare notes and work up the points. Yes, yes; we will be partners—I the silent, you the active one. I supply the capital, and you the brains. Ha, ha! that's good! In this case a sound concern, I assure you. Well, partner, let's proceed. So the old fellow was suspicious, was he? As soon as he came into the house, of course he asked who that strange man was that he saw going out of the lane. Eh?"

She nodded assent, her face slightly averted lest he should see the look of confusion and apprehension upon it. She was deeply excited, though she forced her will to the utmost to keep herself outwardly calm, aiding herself in this by pressing her hands firmly together as they lay in her lap. Yet, despite her efforts at control, her reasoning powers for the moment seemed submerged in the sea of vague fears and more definite suspicions that swept over her mind. She felt certain Slade had planned some wicked scheme, to succeed in which he was confidently relying upon her aid. What could this scheme be? Was it against her, or her mistress, or the boy, or all three of them? She hesitated more than ever now what she should further say to him—how much or how little to tell him. But out of all this tumult of ideas came, clear as an inspiration, the great necessity of gaining his confidence. She must learn, if possible, his future plans. Safety, if safety there could be, lay only in this course.

"Come, come! Let your scheming brain rest a moment," he said with a laugh that had something of a menace in it. "It will be time enough for you to think how you can head me off when you know what I want to do. But," with a sudden air of seriousness in voice and manner, "I am not much afraid of your opposition, Aziel. I imagine you will act in this matter as I wish you to," leaning nigher to her, until his face was so close to her own that she felt his breath upon her cheek. "You will run no risk with me, I am sure."

Each of these last words was accompanied by a slow, emphatic shake of the head, and poured with sibilant whispers into her very ear. He smiled complacently at the effect of what he had said. Drawing now slightly away from her, he looked at her over his shoulder and

silently regarded her with an expression of triumph, whose possibilities of evil, had she seen it, would have made her far more fearful of him than she even now was. She was not looking at him. Her head had fallen upon her breast, as if struck down there by this man who had thus spoken to her. Her hands rapidly twined about each other in a nervous, passionate clasp that drove every vestige of blood from them, leaving them white as the pale face above, the pallor of whose cheeks was reflected on the lips pressed under the set teeth. Now one hand groped about her heart—a motion of hers he remembered well—and then she gave a sigh, followed quickly by a groan, and then a little burst of helpless tears.

“There, there! Don’t cry on so small a provocation,” he said with a faint touch of compassion in his tone he certainly did not feel, judging by the exulting smile. “Save your tears for greater sorrows, and for fears more worthy of them. You understand me, I see, and that is all that is necessary for mutual safety, although, to be honest, I must confess safety—if that is the word to use instead of happiness—affects you in this affair more than it possibly could me. One who has nothing to lose has little to fear, you know. But come, dry your eyes,” giving his hands a little clap with affected gayety; “it’s only an April shower, after all. Never fear that you and I shall fall out. Equal partners share and share alike. Ah ha! Let’s go back to business now. So the old curmudgeon tried to find out who I was? Commendable curiosity on his part, I am sure. People should always make sure as possible of the character of their visitors. Did he ask you or Mrs. Slade that was as to the identity of yours truly?”

“He questioned me,” she replied, more composed now, though her voice still trembled. “She had gone to her room when he came home.”

“Egad! I should say she would, to judge from her condition when I left her. She didn’t look much like the devoted wife waiting to greet her husband on the threshold of their happy home. Two loving husbands! No wonder her cup of bitterness was full. So you were the opaque medium through which he received impressions of

my identity ! Well, how did you dispose of me ? I hope you told him who I was ?”

“No, I did not,” she said, falteringly, stumbling at her words as she went. “I thought, at least, you acted as if you did not want him to know—”

“Pshaw ! that’s where you were mistaken. Of course I want him to know who I am, and the sooner the better for all concerned—and for my purpose especially. Well, who did you tell him I was ?”

“My brother, just returned from California ;” and a blush swept over her face, as if she would have concealed this deception from her listener had she been able.

“Your brother !” He laughed contemptuously. “Why, woman, you might have known he would not believe that. All the circumstances pointed to the contrary. However, let this mistake pass now. It in no way affects my plans—our plans, I should say, for you and I, as I said before, are to work together. Have you been able to guess, while we have been sitting here, what my intentions are, or what scheme has suggested itself to me in which you could aid me ?”

She shook her head negatively. A lassitude had come upon her, a feeling of passiveness, the reaction doubtless of her overstrained nerves, which she felt had now succumbed to the power of his superior will.

“I will tell you, then,” he went on, “both my object and my plans for attaining it. To be frank, my object is money ; and to be franker, my plan is to get it out of that highly-benevolent individual your present master, and the husband of Mrs. Slade that was. I see already, by your looks, you think this impossible. Wait until I unfold the details of my plan, and you will say it does justice to my shrewdness of other days. I have learned that old Gagger is a very jealous as well as a very mean man. Is that so ?”

“Yes, he is jealous, but more jealous of his money than anything else. He is very close in all his dealings—very saving in his way of living. He is a very grasping and miserly old man. I am afraid you will not get any money out of him. He never gives away so much as a cent even in charity—”

"Oh, bother his meanness!" he interrupted with a snap of his fingers. "I don't care for that, so long as he is jealous. That's the part of the mine for us to work—that's the lead to follow; and the more jealousy we find, the richer will be the return for our labors. Eh, Aziel?"

"I do not understand you," she said, looking up at him with an expression of genuine bewilderment.

"Do not comprehend me yet, and you a woman!" slightly elevating his brows. "Then I will explain still further, and plainly, too. This man has my wife. By law I can reclaim her within six months. Now, if he wants to keep her, he must pay me for her, and pay me handsomely. You understand that, don't you? It's plain English, and susceptible, I think, of only one construction."

"If this be your plan for getting money out of him, it will surely fail," she said with a slowly-swaying negative motion of her head.

"Oh no, it will not fail," he put in with a confident laugh that slightly startled her, "because you and she will not let it fail."

"We!" she exclaimed. "What can we do?"

"Do! Why everything, in fact. Bless your black, staring eyes! you and she are my right and left bowers in this game. You must make the odd points sure in the score, even if you do not take every trick. You could take all the tricks if you would only play the game with keenness and with spirit. Listen now, and tell me what is easier done than this. I keep out of sight altogether, while you two women proceed to excite his jealousy in every way possible. First you make an honest confession, and tell him that I—the man he saw in the lane—am the husband of prior right; that I have come back to claim my wife, and that I am desperately and devotedly in love with her, and would sooner die than see her the wife of another man. She, on the other hand, must tell him how much she hates me—that will be easily told by her, I guess—and how devotedly attached she is to him. And she can easily make him believe that by practicing on him every semblance of love her woman's wit can suggest. She must coax, and humor, and flatter, and wheedle, and cajole, and fondle, and caress, and kiss him, until the old

fool cries out in his joy that no man was ever so loved before. Once having made him believe this, you and she can then use him for my purpose. You can between you so arouse his jealousy of me, and inflame his fears lest I may yet, as you have so often suggested, tear her away from him, that he will be willing—yes, and anxious, too—to pay me handsomely to give up my legal rights to her. But how am I, the devoted first husband, to be thus approached? Who would have the baseness or the temerity to offer me gold in exchange for my precious wife. Nothing easier. I have one vice—intemperance. When under the influence of liquor, I am approached by some legal representative of the parties in interest, and in a moment of wild delirium, at the sight of five thousand dollars—the price of relinquishment—I sign the paper that parts me for ever from her I loved and worshiped. The next day I leave the country, never again to return, bearing in my bosom the heart that nevermore shall beat with love's responsive throb. Ah, Azriel, woman can never know the depth of a man's love! By the by, if I should die before you, just have that sentiment put on my tombstone, will you? Well, now you have heard my plan, what say you? You will help me work it out?"

"I don't see how I can help you," she said, after a long silence, during which he had risen to his feet and was pacing slowly up and down in front of her, his eyes at every turn bent upon her face. "She never would consent to such a plan. I would not dare tell her of it. You know how proud she is. She would not humble herself even to a king, much less to this old man, who never has so little as a civil word or look for her. But even if she would humble herself to him and do as you suggest, it would still fail of getting you his money. I only wish," she went on, her voice deepening with earnestness and taking on a pleading tone, "that you knew him as well as we do. I tell you truly he would part with anything sooner than his money—friends, relatives, wife. Yes, I really believe he values life itself less than he does gold and silver."

"Well, where differs he in that respect from the rest of the world? Do we not see everywhere virtue, glory and

honor sacrificed to riches? Talk of love being the all-absorbing passion! Bah! It's coldness indeed to gold, which can seduce a saint or make a devil of a seraph. Yes, Aziel, let us be honest, and acknowledge the fact that the race of man is the race after wealth; and I am free to confess that like the rest of mankind I myself am after money, and like them do not object to devious methods of obtaining it, provided the aforesaid methods are known only to myself, or, as in this case, to a couple of intimate friends. So you think she will refuse to aid me? I guess not, when you shall tell her, for me, that the alternative of her refusal will be my compelling her to come back to live with me. I think the bare suggestion of that delightful contingency will make her humble her majesty to somebody considerably less than a king, to use your royal allusion; and as for your aid, Aziel, you will see that your mistress does as I wish, when the failure on your part to successfully influence her will involve disclosures thus far safely hidden through years of constant watchfulness by you, not me—disclosures which, if once made, would cause three hearts to ache; and you know one of those hearts would not be mine."

With a half-audible laugh midway between a sneer and a menace he turned slowly on his heel and walked aimlessly about the little clearing, tossing up the leaves with his foot, regarding her now and then with a careless look, as if her reply was a matter of indifference, so sure was he of the desired result. But only for a moment did the woman sit quietly there, her dazed face hidden in her hands, where it had fallen as she cowered away from him while he was speaking these last words. This final threat of his, as its full meaning, obscured at first, now flashed fully revealed through her mind, had a strange effect upon her, entirely changing her manner toward him. She was no longer passive. She rose quickly to her feet, and ran to him with her arms outstretched and her face white with an agony of entreaty, making every feature rigid.

"Oh, you would not be so cruel!" she cried, catching hold of his arm with a grasp that told well how firm her nerves were now. "Oh, say you would not! Promise me that much, I beg of you! It is all I ask in return for

what I have done for you. Do promise me you will not—do! do! do!”

The tears falling fast, she pressed nearer to him, her face closely upturned to his own. He seemed for the instant to relent a little, for he laid his hand gently on her forehead, and looked down into her glistening eyes with something of compassion in his gaze. But this change in his manner soon passed away. He slowly took away his hand and said, as an expression more cynical than stern came over his face,

“When a man comes to the conclusion that no one, not even those who professed to love him, cares for him—that it makes very little difference to them whether he lives or dies, is sick or well, hungry or fed—”

“No, no! you cannot say that of me,” she cried with a little gush of eagerness, putting her hands with something like a caress upon his shoulders. “You know I have always done the best I could. What more, indeed, could I have done? Tell me, was I not faithful to you when to be so was to crush my very heart?”

Her words at once softened him. Whatever it was she alluded to, it certainly brought back to his memory thoughts tender and sad; for thus he spoke, holding her out gently at arm’s length and regarding her with a varying expression of regret and admiration:

“True, true is every word you say. You have indeed always been faithful to me. Ah! if we only could have the past to go over again, we would not be standing here, both thinking, as I am sure you are, of what might have been had I never met that woman. She was our ruin—the evil spirit that crossed our path, the shadow that fell for ever on our lives. Ah! precious days were they, Aziel, when you and I had never heard of her—happy, precious days!”

He ceased speaking, his voice dying away in a murmur as memory now flooded his soul with the soft light of days long since forgotten. His head drooping, he touched, unconsciously perhaps, her forehead with a gentle kiss. A soft pressure of the lips it was, more like a parting benediction on the dead face of the loved than the tremulous kiss of hesitating love. Her head ere this had fallen

upon his shoulder, and her eyes had closed themselves in a mist of tears, whether happy or sorrowful she knew not. A strange restfulness of mind, despite the agitation his recent words had caused, came stealing over her with a dreamy forgetfulness of time and place. How wondrously tranquil her bosom, heaving more calmly with subsiding emotion! Her head lay upon his breast, over his throbbing heart—her heart then and now perhaps! She felt the kiss he gave her. It did not startle her as it would have done a few months ago. It pervaded her soul like the subtle incense of flowers, lulling her to rest, sweet rest at last, yet brief at very longest.

How it happened that this spell of enchantment was so rudely broken she could never tell herself. She only knew that in some mysterious way she was startled into the full consciousness of where she was and what she was doing. The next instant she had snatched her cheeks, hot with confusion, from his breast, closed her eyes to his gaze, tender as of old, and torn herself away from his arms. Then, as he spoke to her kindly and sought to detain her with a slight hold, she had turned from him and fled out of the woods into the main road, where she flew along, not once looking back until she had reached the village street. Then, seeing he was not following her, she fell into a slow pace and bent all her remaining energies to calming herself. This she found impossible just now, and fearing to risk an interview with Rader Craft in her present agitation, she drew her veil more closely about her face, and turned into a cross-road which would lead her back to her home by a longer way than she had come. As for him, he stood where she had so abruptly left him, his arms slowly folded across his breast, his lips firmly set, and his eyes riveted upon her until she was out of sight.

"It is strange," he muttered, "that she should still affect me in this manner. I thought that seven years' separation would have wrought a change in either her or me. I know not why it is that when we are alone she works such a spell upon me. Somehow, when she talks and acts as she did just now, I feel myself another man, with different thoughts and feelings awakened within me, as if

from the sleep of the dead. But pshaw!" with a toss of his head and a cynical smile; "what's the use of giving time to maudlin thoughts? I cannot live on sentiment. Life is real, as the poet says, and no one has had more numerous proofs of its realities than I have. It's each man for himself, despite the cry of universal brotherhood, and even crime, provided it is not detected, is a quicker road to success, if not a surer one, than virtue. So, Seth, my boy," tapping himself significantly on the breast, "drop sentiment and attend to business. Better be without sentiment than without money; and to save money by the slow and uncertain process of labor, and by the rules of honest acquisition, is not suited to your disposition, Seth, or your peculiarity of genius;" and flinging out his arms with a chuckling laugh, he took his way deeper into the woods. Here, in a sunny spot that promised him perfect immunity from observation or discovery, he sat down and began to more thoroughly systematize his plan of operations. As he thought intently how best to accomplish his purposes it was evident, from the evil smiles that played over his features, that he was not maturing the faint aspirations after a better life which the recent words and presence of the woman had for the instant stirred in his breast.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH DIBBS REVEALS HIMSELF.

THE bar-room of the Green Tree Inn was at the present time without any appearance of life save that represented by its presiding genius, Bill Dibbs, with his pet mocking-bird dozing in a cage by the window. This morning, though it was within a few moments of his happiest hour—dinner-time—Dibbs had not his usual smile of happy content upon his face, but it bore instead an anxious, thoughtful look, such as was habitual to him when alone. He was, as he would himself have expressed it, deeply meditating—evidently one moment presenting

difficult problems to his mind, and the next instant trying to solve them. He had come out from behind the bar now, and, with eyebrows contracted, was measuredly walking up and down in front of the counter, his coat-lapels flung carelessly back, his thumbs in the arm-holes of his vest, his fingers, extended in a regimental line, pressed upon his breast, and his head inclined slightly forward. This was an attitude of mental absorption which he had copied after Rader Craft, Esq.'s, consequential manner in his office when a client was consulting him on an important case. Now, abruptly coming to a halt, after the style of this self-same lawyer, Dibbs whirled upon his heels, fixed his eyes with a stern glare upon the pitcher of water, at which, in lieu of a client, he pointed his fore-finger with an overawing look, and muttered, as he had heard Craft do in similar cases,

"Your story, sir, is very strange, mysterious, impossible—I may say incredible, sir! But it shall be investigated, substantiated or falsified. Mark me, sir, probed to the very bottom! If true, sir, you have a remedy; if false in any particular, then," lowering his voice, "with due regard to the natural bias of an interested individual, we will omit that particular in the presentation of our case. The law, sir, with a humanity and justice all its own, gives us entire control of our testimony and the method of presenting it.

"Gentlemen of the jury," continued Dibbs, in a burst of forensic eloquence after the style of his model, spreading out his arms until they embraced in their benevolent sweep the entire row of bottles, gilt-lettered and with silver-plated stoppers, on the back-shelf, "the case, briefly stated, is this: A stranger comes suddenly, alone and at night to the Green Tree Inn. He tells not his name; he states not his errand. He first takes a drink with the gentleman who elevates the decanters of the splendidly-equipped saloon of that establishment. Then, having by this means—as he supposes—ingratiated himself into the good feelings of the elevating individual aforesaid, he proceeds to deliver himself of sundry questions. Sundry questions, I say, gentlemen, but they all bear with a strange coincidence upon the inmates of the residence of

Silas Gagger, and especially—mark it well, gentlemen!—upon the wife of that most estimable freeholder and highly-respected and beloved citizen of Slowville.

“Now, gentlemen, I beg you to follow me carefully, and mark the next step in this domestic drama. Having gained all necessary information for his base purposes, this mysterious stranger left the Green Tree Inn under the pretext—ay, gentlemen, and with his own declaration—that he was going to the Lyceum or the village mart, and would return again and pass the slumbers of the night beneath the hospitable roof of the Green Tree Inn. But, gentlemen, he neither visited the places aforesaid, nor returned to the hostelry, with its inviting saloon, over which our esteemed fellow-townsmen, William Dibbs, Esq., has the honor of presiding.

“Gentlemen of the jury, where did this man go? Into whose house, I ask you, did he enter with stealthy step, and from whose fair brow and cheeks did he drive the crimson tide of beauty and make her face whiter than the marble of Diana’s temple? Would that I might draw the veil of secrecy here, but the cause of my client and the demands of justice compel me to go on to the sad and bitter end.

“Why, gentlemen, why did this mysterious stranger ask questions that bore almost entirely upon the whereabouts and present status of Mrs. Silas Gagger, the beautiful and accomplished wife of one of our most generous and admired citizens? What was his secret purpose? What his hidden object? What his sinister scheme?

“Ah, gentlemen, there is a serpent in every field, no matter how green its sward basks in the sunshine; there is a bee in every flower, no matter how sweetly it smells upon the pulsing summer air.

“Gentlemen of the jury,” lowering his voice, as dismal as the solemnity of his face, to a hoarse whisper, “this mysterious stranger is the serpent whose slimy form we see trailing itself through blooming flowers and verdant grass toward the happy home on yonder hill. He, gentlemen, is the bee that seeks, in his straight and arrowy flight, the matrimonial flower which blooms in the garden of our respected friend—seeks it, gentlemen, only to leave

his sharp and bitter sting behind—a sting that hath the poison of death in its faintest touch. Ay, gentlemen, and the poison has already, in one brief night, begun its work of ruin and decay. Hardly has the beginning of day gilded the eastern horizon ere my dishonored client, who now presents his sad case to you for your consideration and judgment, leaves his home, upon which misery worse than all the thousand woes of earth has fallen, and goes out into the world with his love betrayed, his honor made a mockery, his heart broken, and his crushed soul bleeding itself away.

“Ah, gentlemen, old age in distress is always a pitiable spectacle, melting even adamant hearts to tears, but the saddest of all sights is an old man driven out into the cold, heartless and cruel world, robbed of his wife, his home and every joy his aged heart holds dear—an old man homeless, wifeless, betrayed, robbed and deserted! Pardon my emotion, gentlemen.”

Here, Dibbs, turning aside his head and covering his face with his hand, took out his handkerchief and slowly wiped his eyes, trembling all the while from head to foot with visible agitation. In a few moments he seemed to have sufficiently recovered himself to go on with his appeal.

He turned slowly around to the jury, his eyes still lowered. Clearing his throat of its huskiness, he blew a reviving blast upon his nose, gave himself a reassuring shake all over, thrust the handkerchief into his coat-tail pocket, pulled up his coat-sleeves some six inches above his wristbands, finally ran one hand through his bristling hair, and, for the first time since this affecting outburst of emotion, now raised his eyes to the imaginary jury—namely, the dozen or thereabouts of bottles, which seemed to have maintained a strangely stolid indifference to his appeals during this affecting oratorical scene.

But as Dibbs slowly lifted his eyes, as if to note the effect of his exordium, they fell with blank surprise upon the form and features of Rader Craft himself, who at this moment opened the door at the rear of the bar, and now stood facing the orator.

“That was very well done, Mr. Dibbs,” said the lawyer with his ever-bland smile as he closed the door behind

him and advanced to where the young man stood, confused and almost frightened. "I had no idea you had so good a memory or such wonderful powers of imitation. As I stood outside the door yonder and listened to you, I could almost fancy I heard my own voice and words in the great divorce case of *Fox vs. Fox*, which I argued this summer. In fact, I did recognize the thoughts as well as the peculiar construction of the sentences, and most of the phraseology. May I ask," with a gracious wave of the hand and a patronizing expression in the bland smile, "how and where and why you committed them to memory? I feel very much complimented by your so doing, I assure you."

Dibbs, quickly perceiving that the lawyer was in no ways offended, but, on the contrary, rather pleased, as readily changed his manner to that of his usual freedom and confidence when talking with this man.

"So," he said with a bland smile very like the other's, "you are desirous of informing yourself how and where and why I committed to memory your celebrated peroration in the renowned case of *Fox vs. Fox*? How did I commit it? By the aid of a memory as flexible as it is tenacious, I conveyed it from the columns of the *Slowville Patriot* to the everlasting palimpsest of my own brain. Where did I commit it? Where else, honored sir, save behind yonder humble bar, when I caught the fleeting moments as they sped by day, or, stretched on yonder miserable pallet, conned them over beneath the darkness of the night, that flew too swiftly for my thoughts."

"Why, Dibbs, you are eloquence personified this morning," said Craft with a condescending motion of his head as he patted the young man on the shoulder.

And there was a trace of wonder in his face that even the smile could not conceal.

"Why did I commit it?" went on Dibbs, paying no heed to the interrupting compliment. "Because, sir," laying his hand upon his breast with a modest bow, "I admired it for the rare simplicity of its style and the subtle harmony of its periods. I tell you, Mr. Craft," suddenly warming up and his eyes kindling, "that was a wonderful exhibition of eloquence! I was in the court-room when

you delivered that argument, and every time you finished one of those long sentences I could see the jurymen bend their heads in approval, just as regularly as if they were toy-men all pulled by one string. Yes, yes! that was a great speech—a magnificent specimen of special pleading!”

Dibbs, as if overpowered by the recollection, suddenly ceased speaking, and crossing his arms stood silently gazing at his companion with profound esteem.

“I see I have a sincere admirer and a firm friend in you,” said the lawyer, speaking slowly and with emphasis, “and I can truly say I reciprocate your feelings.” Then, after an impressive pause, “William Dibbs you are a young man of no ordinary abilities. I am astonished at this exhibition of your oratorical and linguistic powers. They indeed surprise me beyond adequate expression.”

“Whatever, honored sir, I am, I am indebted to your example and encouragement for it,” spoke Dibbs with ready frankness and a humble bow, his hand pressed upon his heart.

“Indebted to me!” exclaimed the lawyer. “Explain yourself. This is a surprise.”

“Yes, sir, I am indebted for it all to you. Mr. Craft, when you appeared in this town, five years ago, I said to myself, as soon as I heard your first speech in court, ‘There is the man I would like to be.’ Such language as you employed I had never heard before. Such gestures I had never beheld. Your whole style, your comprehensive vocabulary, your graceful attitudes, and the musical modulations of your voice, captivated me, honored sir, beyond expression; and from that day to this I have been studying and imitating you.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Craft, settling himself in a chair and regarding his companion with a look of surprise that struggled with the bland smile for supremacy. “In what respect have you studied and imitated me? This is a very interesting revelation, and a pleasing one too. We can pay no greater compliment to a person than to adopt him as an example.”

“That compliment, I trust, you will recognize in my humble self,” said Dibbs. “First, as to general appearance,” stepping in front of his companion and proudly

squaring himself for exhibition in detail. "Note my face—clean-shaved and smooth like your own. Do you perceive, also, the arrangement of my hair?—cut closely, and without part on either side or in the back."

Dibbs, bending over, rapidly whirled his head around until he had brought to view its entire surface. Then he made it resume its upright position, thrusting his fingers through the forelock, and causing it to stand up straight and tall as a miniature sheaf of wheat.

"Your hair is certainly trimmed and worn like my own," said Craft, "though I must confess that until this present moment the fact had escaped my notice."

"After all, this tonsorial similarity is only a trivial affair," resumed Dibbs with a dismissing wave of his hand. "It is the apparel, as Shakespeare says, that oft proclaims the man. And if you glance ever so casually at my *tout ensemble*, as the French describe it, you will see, honored sir, the reflection of your own excellent taste and judgment. Behold," rapidly pointing to each article indicated, "my standing collar, the points meeting in front; my small black silk tie; my plain bosom, without pleat or ruffle, with its plain gold studs, and only two of them visible; my modest watch-guard of black twilled silk; the simple gold ring on my little finger; my suit of dark clothes—nothing peculiar about them, and cut in a style individual though general, and so quiet as not to be noticeable; my boots, square-toed; and my hat on yonder peg, a stiff black felt, with a broad brim. Tell me, honored sir, is not my appearance an exact epitome of your own illustrious self?"

"It is indeed," replied the lawyer, briefly surveying his own apparel and comparing it with that of Dibbs. "Strange that I never noticed this before! How long have you been dressing in this way?"

"I approached this style by degrees," rejoined Dibbs, straightening the bow of his tie. "To have suddenly adopted it would have attracted public attention and provoked criticism, that, coming to your illustrious ears, might have been unpleasant to your honored self."

"A very commendable—an exceedingly commendable—prudence on your part," was the complimentary remark of the lawyer, accompanied by a smile no less approving.

"Your cautious procedure in the matter also evidences that you possess a rare knowledge of human nature, its methods of thought and ways of judgment. But inform me: has no one here in Slowville remarked as yet the similarity between your attire and mine?"

"A few persons have recently alluded to it in my presence."

"What did they say?"

"That depended upon whether they were your enemies or your friends. Men's opinions are always biased by their prejudices."

With a profound shake of his head worthy of this oracular utterance, Dibbs bent an expressive look upon his companion.

"I did not know I had an enemy in all this neighborhood," said the lawyer in a half soliloquy.

"Success always brings enemies," spoke the firm voice of Dibbs. "Does Death love a shining mark? So does calumny. Ah, revered sir, jealousy is the assassin that ever, with slow and stealthy step, follows behind the toilsome ascent of merit."

"True, true!" heavily sighed the other. "Little reliance can be placed on earthly friendship. Young man, your utterances are those of a philosopher. I must confess my amazement. How has it been possible for you, in your obscure position here, to gain such a knowledge of human nature as I see you possess?"

"Mr. Craft," said Dibbs, throwing out one foot a little in advance and inserting his thumb in the arm-hole of his vest, "the knowledge that best serves a man in this world is not obtained from books. Learning, I grant, is of value to all men, but the knowledge of men and things is of more value, for it alone is wisdom. It is the eyes and the ears, honored sir, which are the great and natural educators of the mind. A wise man's eyes see aright, his ears hear correctly. The eyes and ears of your humble servant have always been kept open—wide open; shut only, honored sir, when slumber's chains, to use the poet's phrase, have bound them."

"You have been a close observer, then, of the people with whom you have come in contact? You have studied

their characters, noting their peculiarities of speech and manner and drawing your conclusions therefrom?"

"The case concisely stated," said Dibbs with something of a lofty flourish of his disengaged hand. "And I can imagine no better opportunity to study human nature than that afforded me in this very apartment. Here I learn to adapt myself to every phase of character, being all things to all men that I may the better investigate their failings and weaknesses. Why, my illustrious sir, trivial as the test may seem to one of your enlarged views, I can tell by the manner in which a man takes a drink and pays for it whether he be a liberal man or a mean one—an honest man or a dishonest one. The test is an infallible one, honored sir—infallible as the law of gravitation."

"Pray go on, and tell me how you accomplish such a result. I confess that I am more than usually interested in this conversation. You are dawning upon me as something of a genius."

"Begging your pardon, Mr. Craft, there is no genius about it. It is only the practical application of common sense. When a man fills his glass nearly to the top with the raw liquor, I know before I look into his face that he is a mean man, and a dishonest man—too mean to pay in full for all the liquor he wants, or else he would separate his one drink into two, and pay for them accordingly. Dishonest, too, for he knows that it is contrary to commercial as well as moral law for a man to drink by the wholesale and pay by the retail."

The lawyer's smile broadened and deepened, then merged into a long and hearty laugh of approval more complimentary to Dibbs than any words he could have spoken. Then he leaned forward in his chair; and composing his face into something like judicial gravity, he said,

"My young friend, you have made to me a most unexpected and astonishing revelation of your abilities. I reiterate my former remark—you are a genius. Your whole conversation indicates rare powers of mind, intellectual and analytical. You are not in your proper sphere, Dibbs. You ought to be a lawyer, and I am

very much inclined, without further reflection, so convinced am I of the truth of my opinion, to offer you a place in my office, where you could properly expand your genius and become something worthy of your present promise. With proper training you have a bright future. What say you to being a student in my office? You can perform clerical duties for me, which will enable you to support yourself until you are admitted to practice. When once you are a lawyer, I shall have no fears for your pronounced success."

"Words are inadequate to express my profound gratitude," replied Dibbs, bowing low; "but I must respectfully decline your generous offer. I have made up my mind as to my course in life, and it is not the practice or the profession of law, honorable and ennobling though they both are."

"May I ask what it is?"

"Most assuredly, honored sir. I intend to be a politician. That's the profession in which I can rise the easiest, and in which," with a knowing wink, "I can make the most money with the least trouble."

"A politician!" exclaimed the lawyer, slowly emphasizing each syllable. "How can you become a politician? Certainly not here in Slowville, with so many ahead of you in social position and standing."

"Of course not. I know my proper field of action. Politicians thrive best in cities, where the caucuses and the polls are left wholly to their manipulation. To a city I intend to betake myself ere long, leaving this country graveyard far behind me."

"To what city?" asked Craft, repressing a smile.

"To Philadelphia or New York; it matters not which to me. Either of them affords a wide scope and a boundless field for a politician's ambition. You may laugh," noticing the other's incredulous smile, "but I am secretly preparing myself every hour for such a life. Slowville will one day suddenly become conscious of the fact that she had once within her borders a man who toiled for fame and fortune while others slept."

"What are your preparations, pray? Are you reading history or studying constitutional law?"

"Not a bit of it. I am studying language just now—increasing my vocabulary, learning as best I can to become an orator for the people. Already I have found the key to success, and am mastering it. A flow of high-sounding words is the main element of success in public speaking. It charms because it bewilders, and impresses because it confounds. Sound, not sense, sways the multitude. Give me full command of the dictionary, and I will carry the day against an army of arguments drawn from reason and experience."

And Dibbs snapped his fingers over his shoulder with a contemptuous toss of his head.

"Dibbs," said the lawyer, "I have been wondering, while you were talking, how you have acquired such a command over the larger words of language. It is a mystery to me. You have had only a common-school education, such as you could pick up here in Slowville three months in the year, and yet you talk like a born linguist."

"Nothing easier, honored sir, than to acquire a voluminous vocabulary. Education, provided one desires it, is only a matter of will. Labor can accomplish anything. Behold the hidden and secret source of my knowledge, disclosed now for the first time to you alone," going behind the bar and taking from a shelf beneath it two books, which he handed with great pride to the lawyer. Craft, with no little astonishment depicted on his face, turned over the well-worn volumes, and read the titles—*Webster's Student's Dictionary*, and *Roget's Thesaurus of English Words*.

"How do you study these?" he asked. "Do you commit them to memory by the page?"

"Not at all. My procedure is less methodical, but more practical, than that would be. The course I pursue is this: I choose a word for investigation—the word 'begin,' for instance. I turn to the *Dictionary*, and learn the derivation of that word, and all its definitions, primary and secondary. Having treasured these up in my memory, I open my *Thesaurus*, and there find the words that have a similar meaning, and these I commit to memory. It is by studying language in this manner that I have acquired a vocabulary which I feel confident, though I am but nineteen

years old, none of my own age can equal, and few older can excel; and, what is an equal satisfaction to me, not a soul of all the common herd of Slowville has a suspicion that I am in possession of this linguistic power. The fullness of time for a public disclosure of my talents has not yet arrived. You only share this secret with me."

"You have found a very excellent method of philological investigation," commented the lawyer handing him back the books; "and as you desire it, I will keep the secret of your acquisitions. But it appears to me you lay more store by words than ideas, for which words are only the vehicle of expression."

"It's the vehicle that carries the load, not the load the vehicle," quickly put in Dibbs; "and before the load can be carried you must first get the vehicle. Is not that correct logic?"

"Your argument is a sound one," rejoined the lawyer after a pause, during which he had looked at his watch and suddenly risen to his feet with the air of a man who has too long delayed the object of his call. "Dibbs, I should like to listen further to your admirable conversation, and hope soon to have a suitable opportunity. Just now I wish to engage your services in a little matter that will be of a pecuniary advantage to you and a professional one to me. My past experience of your valuable assistance in matters more trivial, combined with the clearer insight into your ability which I have just gained, convinces me that I can implicitly trust your secrecy and fidelity in the present case. To come to the point at once, for fear of interruption: you remember the man you confidentially described to me this morning as coming here last night and disappearing in so mysterious a manner? Have you any suspicions as to who he is?"

"Yes, and suspicions evidently well founded, too," said Dibbs, shaking his head with a mysterious nod, his left eye half closed and the other significantly fixed on his companion's face; "and judging from Mr. Silas Gagger's manner of entering your office this morning, I am free to express the opinion that he also has his suspicions."

"Correct, as usual," rejoined the lawyer, laying his fat

hand confidentially on the young man's shoulder; "and, Dibbs," lowering his voice to his usual tragic whisper, "I want you to confirm or allay these suspicions for me as soon as possible. You understand? For me."

"Your purpose in its entirety sensibly perecolates my receptive brain. You, the lawyer very recently retained by the aggrieved party, the plaintiff hereafter mentioned, wish to test my detective ability. William Dibbs is to track the mysterious stranger to his hiding-place and establish his identity, and reveal it to Rader Craft, Esq., alone, who will make use of the information solely in a professional manner, to be hereafter determined by the liberality displayed by the injured husband, Mr. Silas Gagger, whose supposititious cause you heard me presenting to the jury as you entered yonder door."

"Dibbs, your penetrative powers are wonderful! You are a lawyer *natus*, not *fit*—born, not made. I could not have described the present situation of affairs half so well."

Craft rubbed his hands with such a beaming smile, so enthusiastic, so encouraging, that Dibbs' eyes were fixed with instant resolution, which expressed itself in the dogged set of his head, the contracted brows, the threatening eyes and the tightly-compressed lips.

"Dibbs," went on the lawyer with a gracious and somewhat deferential wave of his hand, "I perceive it is better I should leave you to follow the bent of your own genius in this matter. Suggestions to one of your quick apprehension, I feel conscious, would be superfluous. Can I not already, even this instant, read success in the lightning-flash of your eye? Dibbs, I reiterate my previous remark: I am surprised at your singular intelligence—your rare capacity. You have wonderfully educated yourself. You are a self-made marvel—an intellectual pyramid—a moral sphynx."

"The mysterious stranger," said Dibbs, slowly folding his arms and speaking with a dramatic voice, "shall no longer be a mystery, magnifying by his secret movements the danger he threatens to the peace of your honorable client. Ah ha!" starting forward and throwing out his arms on a line with his couching head, and fixing his eyes intently

upon the wall opposite; "I see it all! This domestic and spectacular drama moves before me—every character distinct, every act consecutive. Silas Gagger, the suspicious yet cautious husband, has left his ancestral dwelling and departed from the village to give free scope for the coming investigation already inaugurated by the course of justice, represented by yourself. The mysterious stranger must be lurking in this vicinity, watching his opportunity for a stolen interview. He has already seen the husband's departure, and will undoubtedly visit the farm-house to-night. His evil eyes e'en now do gloat over the beauty of those two lovely females. Let him beware, for I shall be there to watch him, hovering invisibly about his path—an avenging demon to him, a guardian angel to them."

These words, uttered in a tone so sepulchral, sounded indeed like a sentence of doom upon the disturber of domestic happiness.

"Capital! capital!" exclaimed the lawyer, giving vent to an enthusiasm strangely unusual with him, by catching the other's hand in both his own and heartily shaking it. "With such a head as yours to direct, and a heart so bold to execute, what circumstance, even unforeseen though it be, could prevent our complete success? Capital! capital! You will begin your investigations to-night?"

"My investigations in this important matter," rejoined Dibbs with a polite bow, "were *begun* last night. I shall *continue* them to-night—with what result you shall know before the midnight hour, I ween, to speak poetically and precisely at the same time."

"Dibbs, my dear young fellow, you have my best wishes for your success," said the lawyer, again vigorously shaking the hand of his companion and going toward the door by which he had entered. "Oh, here! I declare, I had almost forgotten it," quickly taking a letter from his pocket and thrusting it into Dibbs' hand. "Here is a letter from a client of mine to Miss Aziel Loyd. If you should have an opportunity to give it to her unobserved, and see her read it and note its effect upon her in her looks, her expressions and her actions, and then bring to me a detailed account of your observations, that, too,

would be of pecuniary advantage to you, Dibbs, and of professional usefulness to me. You understand?"

"The object of speech were indeed poorly obtained under the most favorable circumstances did I not comprehend language so simple," said Dibbs, deftly hiding the letter in his pocket with a smile so cunning and confident that Rader Craft positively felt his ponderous heart leap for joy at the certainty of so soon learning the effect of his loving epistle.

In fact, so bewildered was he for the moment by this thrilling anticipation that he forgot the door-steps, and stumbling forward fell upon the ground, whence Dibbs, stifling every indication of his merriment, assisted him to regain his feet.

"The law of gravitation is inexorable," smiled Dibbs. "The lawyer and the client it treats alike."

"Yes," rejoined Craft, planting himself firmly on his feet and trying to regain his bland smile, despite the serious rent in his clothes. "And you might add, without fear of contradiction, that in morals as well as in physics it is easier to fall than to rise—to fail than to succeed."

He limped away in the direction of his office, not a little chagrined at the spectacle he made of himself to the women in the tavern-kitchen, whose noses, pressed against the window-panes, greeted him as he looked confusedly around to see who might have seen him fall.

Dibbs waited until the lawyer had disappeared in his sanctum; then he went back into the bar-room, and locking the outer door, he betook himself, with strange slowness, to his dinner. The corned-beef and cabbage, his favorite dish—and no foe to his easy digestion—failed to put any edge upon his appetite. What was food to him, when his heart was overwhelmed with the joy that, now the lawyer had gone, could flash unsuspected into his eyes—a joy born of the anticipation of this very evening being face to face with Aziel Loyd? Aziel Loyd! He only breathed the name, yet he felt his heart, at even this slight expression, bounce and thump in his breast until he feared lest it should lose its proper place therein and go gyrating through his entire anatomy. He ate his meal with a rapidity that pleased the women, but with a silence

that aggravated them. To all their questions as to who had been in the bar-room that morning and what news he had learned from them, and, last and most important of all, what the lawyer had come for, Dibbs returned answers so short and unsatisfactory as to elicit the most emphatic opinion as to his stupidity. For once he remained master of both the situation and his temper, and went back to his post sole possessor of his secrets and his intentions.

Once again in the bar-room, he turned the key in the door that communicated with the house, and drawing down the window-shades prepared to execute a little strategy on his own part.

"Lawyers," he soliloquized as he held the letter over a little jet of steam that issued from the bubbling kettle on the shelf behind the bar, "are proverbial for their knowledge of human nature. Of course they are the only men in the world who can read character at sight. Now, Rader Craft, Esq., thinks himself a shrewd reader of men, doesn't he? For instance, he takes me for a noodle. Perhaps I am, but not at this present speaking, I should say; for perceiving this mucilage has grown soft under the tender influence of this steam, I am compelled to open this letter, notwithstanding the scruples a noodle is supposed to possess. Having thus opened it, I give way to my laudable curiosity, and read it."

He did so, with his chuckling face close to the sheet, eager to drink in every word thereon. The first few sentences confused him. He could not get at their meaning. He re-read them with a better comprehension after he had examined the letter and read the closing paragraphs. It was a love-letter he saw full well—a love-letter to Aziel Loyd—written by the lawyer; but in whose interest? The question staggered him but for an instant. A jealous light came into his eyes as he again perused the letter, his hands shaking, his breath coming thick and fast. As he went along, muttering each word, his face grew darker, for his suspicions were more and more confirmed. Now, throwing the letter upon the counter, he thrust both hands in his hair and sank down into his chair with a great groan, to which the mocking-bird responded with a sound as doleful.

"Ah, Spike, you may well groan for me!" said Dibbs, looking up at the bird with a heavy sigh. "Shed tears, too, if you can, for my abject misery. For what greater calamity can befall a man, Spike my boy, than not only loving hopelessly himself, but—oh, a thousand times worse!—seeing the object of his undying affection about to become the promised bride of another?"

Again he covered his face with his hands and emitted several groans, less violent than the first, to which the bird responded with a like decrease of animation. After a silence of another moment, Dibbs rose slowly to his feet with despair on every feature. He resealed the letter and put it in his pocket with a savage thrust, much as he might have buried a dagger there. Then he turned to Spike, who was slyly blinking at him, and said, in a subdued voice,

"The secret I have discovered, most noble bird, fills my heart with woe. The lawyer, Spike, is my rival—my deadly nuptial foe! His letter here proves himself to be his own client, and deeply in love with— Forgive me, Spike! I cannot breathe her sacred name even to you, for she is the woman—the Venus de Medici—I adore, ay, madly worship! But, Spike," speaking with sudden energy and striking the counter with his fist as he spoke, "he shall not have her. This very night I will file a bill in equity against him that will for ever bar his suit!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NIGHT'S ADVENTURES OF WILLIAM DIBBS.

IT generally falls to the lot of men to have a hopeless passion once in their lives. Certainly such was the case with poor Dibbs, who now spent a most melancholy afternoon in analyzing both the extent of his love for Aziel Loyd, and how impossible it was of fruition. Yet he seemed to take a sad delight in torturing himself with the infinite expansion of his love for her and the insurmountability of its accomplishment.

"Oh, if it were only something else," he groaned, walking about the bar-room, "that reared this barrier between us, then might I hope. Had wealth or station, parents or friends, opposed this union, then might I have conquered each and all of them. But who, though he love with the power of an archangel, can bring back the flight of years and make the matron a maiden again? Or who can hurry onward the slow-revolving wheel of time and give to youth the prime of manhood? Alas, alas, Aziel—dearest Aziel!" he exclaimed, clasping his hands and looking up at the ceiling, as if she were there suspended in some angelic form. "Time, that most powerful enemy of man, has separated us for ever from that union of hands in which my only hope of happiness consists. The great and impassable gulf of years is between us! I cannot come to you, nor you to me!"

Dropping his linked hands in front of him, he held them together in a maddened grip, and, with head thrown far down upon his breast, he stalked about the room, gritting his teeth and rolling his eyes with frenzy.

While in this paroxysm of despair he chanced, as he passed near the window, to lift his eyes. They fell upon the form of the lawyer, who was walking with majestic air down the street.

"Villain!" exclaimed Dibbs in the hoarsest of whispers, seizing a cane from the corner and bringing it to his shoulder with a quick and deadly aim—for, sighting along the ferule, one could see it point directly to the lawyer's heart—"revenge prompts me to take thy warmly-flowing blood—to still for ever the tumultuous beating of thy heart—to stifle in eternal silence thy throbbing bosom, so full of love for her I worship in the long and weary day, and in the longer and wearier night! But no," suddenly throwing aside the cane and resuming his tragic pace; "live on, mine enemy—live on and know thyself what it is to despair—to find thy love turn to ashes in thy very hands—to see thyself rejected, scorned, despised, the canker of unrequited love consuming for ever thine unhappy soul!"

The clock and the mocking-bird here interrupted him, the one by striking, the other by emitting a short whistle

for every stroke of the clock. Dibbs glanced at the clock; and seeing that it was the hour of four, he immediately set about regaining his composure, which he did after several sighs and mocking laughs. Calm now, he betook himself to the careful perusal of a little book which he drew from his pocket. It was a manual of etiquette, and, unlike most books of that kind, was written by a competent person. This manual Dibbs knew almost by heart; and if he were an *habitué* of Slowville society—which he was not—he would, as he himself expressed it, astonish the natives by his manners. But never being invited to any social gathering, and being shunned by the better class of villagers because of his occupation, Dibbs never had any opportunity to display his knowledge of manners in the company of ladies. He had practiced these forms of etiquette, nevertheless, just as he was doing now, with imaginary females in the chairs about him, and he went from one chair to another with a gracefulness of carriage and easy inclination of the head, dropping a compliment here and an observation there, as if he were indeed a frequent guest in the highest social circles, and this present circle were the highest of Slowville society.

“Good-evening, Miss Loyd,” he was saying as he made a bow in front of one of the chairs. “I beg pardon for presenting myself, but I come at the solicitation of Rader Craft, Esq., attorney and counselor-at-law, who commissioned me to bear to your most excellent self this letter,” which, at these words, he took from his pocket and extended toward her with a slight inclination of his head; and then, after a pause, during which she was supposed to be reading the letter, he seated himself in a chair in response to her invitation.

Holding now his hat gracefully in his hand, he entered into a very animated conversation with Miss Loyd, endeavoring to make it as interesting to her as possible by telling all the news of the village, which he garnished in his own inimitable way, so that its savor was largely increased by his spicy additions. This rehearsal being finished to his satisfaction—and during it all he had successfully stifled any manifestation of his love—Dibbs locked

the bar-room; and giving the key to the landlady, Mrs. Susan Boozer, widow, who tended the bar during his absence, he went over to the lawyer's office.

The door of "The Legal Refuge" he found, as usual, unlocked. He opened it and entered, and immediately set about the object of his coming. This was to copy something out of a certain one of the lawyer's books, which he had already seized from one of the shelves, and whose leaves he was rapidly turning over. He was not long in finding the desired place, as a low whistle of exultation indicated. And now, with a smile as cunning as any with which the owner of the book had ever looked into it, Dibbs copied several paragraphs on one of the lawyer's sheets of brief-paper.

"This kind of writing-paper will carry judicial weight as regards the contents," commented Dibbs with a chuckle as he folded up his manuscript and returned the book to its place. "Could any but sound law be written on a lawyer's brief-paper? That would depend, perhaps, on both the lawyer and the judge. But in this case there is no doubt about the law—at least until the next legislature meets. How those wise and good men may alter it, the—devil only knows."

He left the office as boldly as he had entered it, and sought his own room under the plain roof of the Green Tree Inn. Here, by the aid of a couple of candles upon the bureau, he began to prepare himself for his evening call, with a scrupulous attention to every detail which might well have become a groom upon his nuptial morning. As he donned each article of carefully-selected apparel he hummed a ditty, now gay, now mournful, one moment chided and another applauded himself, sighing and groaning, and smiling and laughing, by turns, according to the current of his thoughts, which were an odd commingling of love and jealousy, ambition and cunning, hope and despair, joy and fear.

"William Dibbs," he soliloquized, putting a little dash of perfumery upon his handkerchief and surveying himself with an air of satisfaction, "I am proud to say you look like a gentleman, and that is more than can be said of many who make exertions in that direction. If clean-

liness is next to godliness, there is also much of the saint in your present appearance. Ah, Aziel!" with a sigh, as he gave a finishing touch of precision to his necktie, "if you were only entering the path of youth, or I meandering along the highway of manhood, what joy might be our heavenly lot in this dreary world, where the phantom of bliss ever allures with falsest hopes the panting and famishing heart! But as William says, 'Oft expectation fail, and most oft there where it most promises.'"

With two mighty sighs that extinguished the candles he dashed the imaginary tears from his eyes and went down to his supper; for, however famishing his heart might be, there was always one organ in his anatomy in a continual state of want, but which his prodigious and frequent mastication failed to satisfy.

"Well, Mr. Dibbs," began Mrs. Susan Boozer, with a wink to her sisters, as the young man took his seat at the table with a familiar greeting and a confident air, and proceeded to help himself bountifully from the several dishes, "what gal are you goin' to fool 'round this evenin'? 'Pears to me you're slicked up in purple an' fine linen worse nor them King Solomon tells about in the Good Book."

"Whew! What a heavenly smell!" exclaimed one sister. "La, Mr. Dibbs! you must have got a whole geranium-bush tucked away in that 'ere coat o' your'n!"

"I never saw Mr. Dibbs look so killing," put in the other sister, with an ogling smile at him. "It's really dangerous for him to go out to-night. The girls will die of envy at the very sight of him."

To all of which badinage Dibbs made the following reply, which, for reasons best known to himself, was not couched in that pure or studied English with which he addressed the lawyer or expressed himself in private. "Take me for a noodle, ladies," he said, looking at them each in turn with a broad grin, and redoubling the celerity of his knife and fork, "I am got up in style, that's a fact. Am glad you like my looks. Clothes will tell, though. They are a blessing as well as a delight. I know a woman who was saved from drowning once by her hoop-skirt holding her up in the water. Another

saved her skull, in a fall, by a thick bunch of back hair—not her own, of course.”

“You’re as smart as you are handsome,” said the ogling sister. “The parson ought to get you for his daughter. She thinks in Greek and talks in Latin, they say.”

“You don’t say she thinks, do you?” rejoined Dibbs, emptying his second cup of tea at a draught. “Well, that’s where she beats people in general. They talk without thinking.”

“Where did you say you were goin’?” suddenly asked Mrs. Boozer, hoping thus to throw him off his guard.

“Just now,” gayly answered Dibbs, his knife and fork making a final skirmish on his plate, “I am going to leave the table; next, I am going to leave the house; and then I am going to leave my respects at the first house where the young ladies are out. And now, having said ‘Going’ three times, I once say ‘Gone,’ and bid you all good-evening and good-night!”

With a little waving flourish of his hand to each of them he skipped across the floor, caught up his coat and hat and cane, and disappeared with a final grin through the outer door.

“He’s a fool, if there ever was one,” said Mrs. Boozer, elevating her contemptuous nose over her third cup.

“Strange to me he has sense enough to tend the bar,” commented sister number one, her thin lip curling with derision over an ample slice of bread, in which her teeth were making a serrated half moon.

“Don’t you be so sure he’s a fool,” rejoined the ogling sister. “I’m much mistaken, or he knows more than he lets on. And if he does look green, he may for all that be ripe, like some apples. But what puzzles me is where he gets all the money he spends on clothes. They must cost more than his wages amount to.”

“Well, one thing is certain—he doesn’t steal it from me,” spoke Mrs. Boozer with energy. “I have had my eyes on him all the time. Many’s the marked note and silver piece I’ve put in the till these last two years, and never one of them have I missed. No, I will say that for him: Bill Dibbs is honest!”

While this discussion as to his character went on, Dibbs, with anything but complimentary remarks upon the women he had left, was cautiously making his way along the village street, screening himself from observation by walking in the darkest places and dodging behind trees when anybody came in his direction. It was only when he had passed beyond the village outskirts, and found himself on the open road, that he relaxed this excessive watchfulness. Now he began to fix his thoughts more intently upon the business in hand, and put on at the same time a new pair of lavender kids, which he treated carefully and tenderly. "For," said he, "new gloves are like maidens' favors: they come the easier by coaxing."

It was a dark night. The moon would not rise till late, and a cloudy sky shut out the stars. Dibbs had naught to guide him save the dull line of the road—visible only a few feet ahead—in the middle of which his keen eyes helped him keep his way. On he walked with a bold tread, swinging his stout cane, now in front and now on either side of him, cutting the black air with such heavy strokes that no one could have suddenly come upon him with any advantage. The farther he left the village behind, the more frequent and vigorous became the sweeps of his cane, as if he indeed feared assassination at any moment. Whether it was because his own principles taught him to be suspicious, or he was naturally superstitious, his mind now became filled with strange fancies and apprehensions. The silence and the solitude began to fill his ears with mysterious sounds and his eyes with blood-curdling phantoms. There were stifled voices in the air and hollow groans behind the fences that skirted the road. The bushes took on the indistinct yet tangible forms of crouching men and beasts of prey, while the trees towering along the way became giant spectres, casting their huge arms athwart the gloom, that came down upon him now as black as the funeral pall he remembered to have seen stretched upon his mother's bier. His mind suddenly began to be invaded by some awful horror. Despite all his attempts at reasoning, his imagination filled him with direful apprehensions. What if some evil spirit were following him, waiting only a moment.

more to fall upon him and crush him into a shapeless mass or hurl him, powerless and speechless, into some yawning chasm, that might open here in this very road, and swallow him up in sulphurous fire? This thought paralyzed him. Alone and in the dark with a ghost! He stood motionless with terror, his knees trembling, his teeth chattering and the cold perspiration trickling down his forehead.

So overcome was he that he would have sunk down in the road at the first breath of wind through sheer fear, had not the sound of footsteps coming on behind him startled him into the consciousness that there might yet be safety in flight. Fly he did, leaping along the ground with a speed that carried him on like the fleetest athlete, every muscle strained, his eyes distended, and his nostrils dilated with quivering breath. On—on, he ran, as if the pursuing hand of that nameless Thing behind him were just about to clutch him. Past Nicholas Grundle's hut—that dreaded place—he flew, his heart beating the louder here lest from the grave in yonder spot so near one more spirit might rise to pursue him. He turned never so much as a glance to see what might follow now, for ahead of him shone in the distance a light in the window of a farmhouse. Oh, if he could only hold out to reach that beacon of safety! No light to the mariner in a storm, his ship driven through black and lashing seas, across which came the boom of the breaking surf, mingled with the howling of the vengeful, driving wind, was ever more grateful than was this light to Dibbs. For as the mariner, with a cry of joy, now heads his vessel in a safe course again and feels his fears give way to hope, so Dibbs, nearing this light, began to take courage, and slackening his pace halted an instant to listen for his pursuer.

He heard no sound save his own rapid and labored breathing and the thumping of his frightened heart. He stood still and listened more intently. All was dark and silent as his own room at midnight, when, startled by some strange sound, he had lain shivering in bed to hear it repeated. For a moment he could not believe he had really escaped his pursuer. He might yet be stealing on him with noiseless step. As he glanced ahead, and saw

he was now at the entrance of the farm-house lane, his courage, which the proximity of the farm-house was fast bringing back to him, suggested that perhaps it was only his imagination that had frightened him. This, however, was an insinuation upon the strength of his reflective faculties that he could not for an instant entertain; so, stoutly asserting to himself that he had been pursued and made his escape by his superior swiftness, he rearranged his disordered attire, wiped the perspiration from his face, and, holding his hat in his hand to cool his head, walked slowly up to the farm-house.

When he came to the steps, he was composed enough to act with his usual caution. He first peeped through the window to see if the mysterious stranger had come before him. The sight of the two women sitting alone made him all amends for the fright he had experienced to gain this precious view of the woman whose face, turned in his direction, seemed to dart a magnetic thrill all through him. No greater bliss, he thought, could he ever desire than to stand here all night and watch her with his eyes, which, longer looking, the more eagerly gazed. A noise in the direction of the barn warned him that his present position in the dark might be perilous to his safety and success. Yet he was not ready to go in. Somehow, he began to be as afraid to enter the house and speak face to face with his idol as he was to stay outside and run a risk in watching her. At last, drumming up his courage, he became bold enough to mount the steps. Then, after a little hesitation, during which he felt his knees growing very unsteady, he lifted the brass knocker, and holding it suspended a moment at last let it drop with a sudden relaxation of his grasp.

Perhaps it was the loud noise of the knocker that had startled him; for when Aziel Loyd opened the door, she saw him standing there with a pale face and frightened eyes. He looked indeed like some culprit caught in the very act. Nor was her own countenance at first without fear as she shrank back and, holding the door midway open, peered cautiously out at him. But soon perceiving he was not the one she had expected to see standing there, she opened the door wider and boldly asked,

"Who are you, and what do you want?"

"Why, don't you know me, Miss Loyd?" he stammered, pulling off his hat and looking at her, as he leaned forward with something between a grin and a stare on his face. "I'm Dibbs—Bill Dibbs, they call me. I—I stay at the Green Tree Inn."

"Indeed?" she said, regarding him with an indifference that made his heart sink so heavily in his breast that he thought it never would come up again. "And what might your errand be? Whom do you wish to see?"

"I—I came to see—you," he found courage to say, though falteringly, as he fidgeted with his hat, and began to wish himself miles away, if this were to be his reception on coming for the first time into the close presence of his divinity.

"Came to see *me*?" she exclaimed, looking at him so sternly that his eyes drooped sheepishly away from her gaze. "What business can you possibly have with me?" Then, speaking in a more encouraging voice, for she saw his bashfulness was further confusing him, "Pray come in and tell me."

He stumbled over the doorsill in his agitation, and followed her into the room with a crestfallen air, his bearing as starchless as his wilted collar. So disconcerted was he by the coolness of her manner that he failed to hear her invitation to take a seat, but stood gaping at her with a sickly smile, his hat meanwhile rapidly oscillating between his two hands.

"Be seated, Mr. Dibbs, and state your errand," she said, unable to keep from smiling at the odd figure he was presenting. "Take this chair," pointing to one near her; and then, noticing how his eyes roved restlessly and with suspicious glances about the room, she added, with a nod of encouragement, "You can be perfectly at your ease; we are alone."

"Isn't Mrs. Gagger around?" he asked in a hoarse whisper, drawing a pace nearer with a dramatic stride, holding his finger up in token of silence and throwing into his face an expression of extreme caution.

"You needn't fear Mrs. Gagger," she replied with a little laugh, for he was making the circuit of the room on

tip toe, much after the manner of heavy villains on the stage. "She has gone to her room, and will not interrupt us. Do sit down and tell me why you have come to see me. Your errand must be a very important one, for you are evidently much excited."

He silently crossed the room to where she was sitting, and after much hesitation, during which he looked at her with a confusion of smiles, glances of admiration and faint sighs of despair, abruptly seated himself beside her. He tried to speak, but could not. He began toying with his hat, now putting it on the floor, now holding it outstretched in his hand, and now resting it on his knees. All the while his face, fixed on hers, grew sillier, and his feet shuffled in and out from under his chair.

"Have you forgotten your errand?" queried his companion with a kindly smile that raised his spirits fifty degrees, and made him feel as if he were going up in the air and his chair were slipping away from him.

"Take me for a noodle," he at last giggled out, letting his hat fall upon the floor and catching hold of the sides of his chair. "I've forgotten what I came here for! My head is whirling all around. Don't I look queer?"

"No, you look very harmless," she rejoined with a laugh, the melody of which fell upon his ears like a heavenly strain, and suddenly fortified his soul and made his heart beat happily with the thought that at least she had not repulsed him. No, she had let him sit so near her he could touch her hand if he but dared.

"I've got a letter for you," he tittered, regaining somewhat of his courage and hitching his chair a trifle closer to hers. "Here it is. I guess you know who wrote it." With his face, in a broad grin, still fixed on hers, he took from his pocket something which he held out to her.

"I should hardly call that a letter, Mr. Dibbs," she said, bursting into a little laugh, which drowned his last surviving fear of her, "unless you carry letters in your handkerchief."

"Take me for a noodle!" he exclaimed, thrusting his handkerchief back into his pocket and producing, after much fumbling, the letter. "I'm kind of mixed this

evening, as Rader Craft would say of a poor witness. You see, Miss Loyd, I am not used to sitting close to a beautiful woman. It makes me feel as if I were somebody else."

She gave him a gracious smile in return for his compliment, and asking him to excuse her for a moment, she left him in a broad and happy grin, and went over to the lamp to read the letter. Dibbs was all eyes now. He watched her every movement and expression with an interest doubly intensified by his cunning and jealousy. He inwardly chuckled at the thought that now he should know if she loved the lawyer, yet the apprehension that perhaps she did made him tremble with an anxious and curious fear. No little satisfaction and encouragement to him was it that she opened the letter and began to read it with nothing beyond curiosity in her face. And more pleased still was he, as she went along, to see how composedly she read line after line without evincing any emotion beyond that of a faint smile as she finished the letter—a smile that had, he saw with inward joy, a touch of weariness and sadness in it as it lingered upon her thoughtful countenance. She quietly put the letter in her pocket, much as if it were one on some ordinary business, and with a face entirely free from suspicion she resumed her seat by Dibbs and asked,

"Did Mr. Craft send this letter by you because he expected you to bring back the reply to it?"

"No, I can't say that he did," replied Dibbs, speaking with an assumed hesitation, by which he hoped to excite her curiosity, and thus lead the conversation into the channel he wished. "But it struck me as rather strange that he wanted me to bring the letter instead of sending it through the post-office."

"It is a little mysterious," she said, "although I presume he had some good reason for so doing. However, you are very kind indeed to come so long a distance, on such an unimportant errand."

She gave Dibbs a thankful smile that raised flattering hopes in his heart and quickened his desire to gain more of her good-will by making the revelations he had in store.

"I would do anything for—for you," he stammered, blushing under the fascination of her glance. "I—I always like to please—the ladies."

"It is certainly very good in you to take such an interest in a stranger. When one has few friends, an unexpected one is certainly an agreeable surprise."

She smiled so sweetly on him now that he no longer hesitated to tell her what he knew. But just how best to introduce the subject he was at a loss, and he might have altogether failed had he not remembered the conduct of the lawyer under similar circumstances. So, with a grave countenance, a few preliminary hems, and slowly wiping his face with his handkerchief, which he as deliberately returned to his pocket, he began, his eyes fixed solemnly on her and his voice in a semi-whisper, while his hands slowly moved with warning gestures:

"There are a great many mysterious movements transpiring in Slowville at the present time. Strange parties have suddenly appeared, and some parties have as suddenly disappeared. There is trouble—serious trouble—brewing in certain localities, but to be forewarned is to be forearmed, and it is worse than folly to run the risk of meeting a secret enemy in the dark when you can as well approach him with the light of his identity shining fully upon him; and better still is it to be advised beforehand of his plans."

And here he paused, and leaning forward, his hands upon his knees, looked at her with a mysterious yet knowing expression, which, as he intended it should, instantly convinced her that he had information that would be of service to her. Aziel Loyd, concealing her surprise under a forced smile that still further won the heart of Dibbs, immediately resolved to find out what he knew, at the same time taking care to give him no clue to her own knowledge of recent events.

"What is it you are trying to conceal from me?" she said in a coaxing tone, laying her hand upon his arm and turning up to him her softly-pleading eyes. "You will surely be my true friend, and tell me what danger threatens me?"

"Will you always be a friend to me if I tell you?"

asked Dibbs, trembling under her touch, and eying her hand askance with a wistful look.

"I will never forget your kindness," she said, slowly, withdrawing her hand; "and if ever I can repay you for it in any way, I certainly will do so."

"It's a bargain!" exclaimed Dibbs, catching her hand and shaking it with vigor; then, letting it drop as suddenly as he had seized it, he sat bolt upright on his chair, his confused face crimsoned with blushes. "Excuse me!" he stammered. "I didn't mean to be impolite, but I thought I could talk better if I—I shook hands with you."

"Why, Mr. Dibbs," she replied with an arch look, "you certainly need not apologize for shaking my hand. Isn't it the token of friendship? See! I will shake yours with both of mine to show you that I will be even more of a friend to you than you to me;" and she took his trembling palm in hers with a merry little laugh, and shook it so long and cordially that he felt his heart dancing with joy. "There, now!" she said, releasing him; "you can go on and tell me just as little or as much as you wish."

His tongue was fairly loosened now, and as she listened to him with an encouraging smile playing about the sweetest lips he ever saw, he told her of the visit of the stranger to the Green Tree Inn, his conversation there, and his subsequent mysterious disappearance. Then, oblivious to any allegiance he might have owed to Rader Craft, he related how that morning he had seen Silas Gagger enter the lawyer's office, and thence take his departure for the noon train eastward. Without waiting for his listener to question him as to the conclusions he had drawn from all these circumstances, the glib and loquacious Dibbs made the fullest revelation of his suspicions as to the identity of the mysterious stranger, the intentions of Silas Gagger and the plans of Rader Craft, winding up his eloquent recital of facts and fancies with this statement, which he delivered with an authority and a confidence that would have well become a judge upon the bench:

"But, Miss Loyd, environed as your mistress is by these surroundings, that threaten her peace and happiness, she

need not despair of escape from the toils of the mercenary stranger, the designing husband or the plotting lawyer. The law is the mighty bulwark under whose towering form she will find hope, protection—ay, safety itself! Behold!” he exclaimed, his eyes flashing and his hand raised aloft, displaying several sheets of paper, which he had drawn from his pocket with a grand flourish; “here are the documents—the very statute laws made in this case and provided. These will guide you and her safely over this stormy sea of trouble, and bring your vessel into a quiet haven with its flag floating triumphantly from the tip of its tapering mast!”

“What do you say these are?” she asked in a dazed way as he thrust the papers into her hand and her fingers closed securely upon them.

It was evident that for the moment the woman was bewildered, more by the unexpected manner in which the young man had made his revelations than by the revelations themselves. These, to a certain extent, she had anticipated, but his choice of language and eloquent gestures were a total surprise, nor could she restrain the look of genuine admiration with which she was now regarding him. Dibbs interpreted this expression of her face as having a deeper meaning. Perhaps—the thought made him tingle from head to foot—it was the faint dawn of a feeling that would yet ripen into the most luscious fruit of Love’s own raising. He must do all he could now to make her more strongly impressed in his favor.

“Those papers,” he said at length, tapping them significantly as they lay in her grasp, “are extracts copied by myself from the law-books of Rader Craft. You will find in them all that Mrs. Gagger,” lowering his voice dramatically, “will ever need to know in regard to her legal rights under certain contingencies. Time and her own good judgment, supplemented by your most excellent advice, will aid her in determining to what extent she shall avail herself of the ample protection which, in any event, the law affords her. Moreover,” laying his hand deferentially upon his breast, “if I can be of further aid to either or both of you in the settlement of present or future issues, command me. There you have the law

verbatim et literatim et punctuatim; here you see one who will ever hold your interests and happiness dearest to his heart. If in trouble, my dear madam, call upon William Dibbs; if in doubt, consult him; if in anxiety, summon him. And, to speak more comprehensively still, in whatever circumstances of female complications or distress you may need his aid, I repeat it, invoke the aforesaid William Dibbs. To relieve lovely women of the faintest care is the highest ambition of his checkered career!"

As he finished speaking he suddenly rose to take his departure, for the clock striking nine warned him that if he wished to further carry out his plans he should no longer linger in this angelic presence.

Aziel urged him to remain. It was early yet; she would be so pleased to have him partake of some refreshments. She would call Mrs. Gagger and introduce him to her. Mrs. Gagger would be delighted to know personally so warm a friend. But finding that to all her urging he returned a reluctant denial, and that he grew more and more anxious to take his leave, she put out her hand; and grasping his with a fervent pressure, she said, with her large black eyes fixed upon him with deepest thankfulness,

"Mr. Dibbs, you have shown yourself a dear, good friend to us. How can we ever repay you? I feel as if we never could. You will come and see us soon again, I hope?"

"Whenever my presence shall be necessary to your further warning, or promotive of your safety from the machinations of secret enemies or open foes, you shall see William Dibbs again. For the present, fair lady, adieu!"

Reverently pressing her hand to his lips—a way of parting he had seen upon the stage—he turned quickly away, and without looking back darted out of the house. He had been gone but a few minutes when Mrs. Gagger came into the room, and the two women stood for a moment looking silently at each other with a mutual expression of astonishment not unmingled with fear. The mistress was the first to speak.

"Aziel," she said, with evident effort forcing somewhat

of composure in her voice and manner, "what is the meaning of all this? I have been listening to his talk with amazement and anxiety. Can it be possible that he is sincere in his professions of friendship for us? or has he come here as a spy? I much fear the latter is the case."

"Spy or not," replied Aziel, "his visit has certainly been to our advantage; and if he did come as a spy, I am sure—thanks to a little innocent coquetry on my part—he has gone away my friend, and, of course, your friend too. I will see to it that he remains faithful to us both. All is fair in war, and nothing fairer than receiving with a hearty welcome any and all deserters from the enemy. First, let us see what information he has brought us here." Crossing to the lamp, she opened the papers Dibbs had given her, and read aloud their contents.

"Then he has the right by law to annul my present marriage any time within six months," said Mrs. Gagger, trying to speak calmly, as Aziel finished reading and slowly raised her eyes, in which was a trifle of triumph.

"Yes," replied Aziel; "but suppose he does, he cannot make you live with him. The law on this point—a most important one to you—is altogether in your favor. You can refuse to live with him, and all he can do is to get a divorce from you for willful desertion. You would not object to that, I am sure," she added with an encouraging smile.

At this moment they were interrupted by the sound of excited voices near the house. They were evidently those of men in close altercation, the tones of one growing louder each instant, while those of the other were subdued, though full of passion. Then all at once there was a dead silence, followed by a gurgling sound and a faint cry for help from the weaker voice, succeeded again by a series of angry shouts from the stronger one and the discharge of firearms. The swift running of feet down the lane was now heard, the flying one crying "Murder!" as he went. Aziel Loyd was the first to command herself, and while her mistress stood pallid and transfixed with fear she ran to the door and opened it. As she did so the light fell upon Patrick Doyle, a malicious

grin upon his face and an old cavalry pistol still held smoking in his hand.

"Lord save ye kindly, Misthress Loyd !" he said, pulling off his hat, with a serape of his foot. "It's only freekenin' the omadhaun I wor wid the noise of me pistol. Bedad, it's a long time agin afore he'll be prowlin' round this house a-lookin' through the windies. God save ye, leddies, both, says I. It's divil a bit o' harrum I'd see comin' to ye by the loikes o' him, the dirty sthrap !"

"You did not hurt him, Patrick ?" anxiously asked Aziel. "The man was Mr. Dibbs, was he not ? You are sure he was Mr. Dibbs ?"

"Is it Bill Dibbs, at the shebeen in the village beyant, ye mane, Misthress Loyd ?"

"Yes, the young man who works at the inn. You are sure the man you saw was he ?"

"Throth, I wish I wor as sure of hiven itself as I wor of the sight o' that same Bill Dibbs, bad luck to him, shure, wid his dalin' out o' pizen to the boys ! It's not his liquor I'd be dhrinkin', savin' I wanted purgatory inside o' me."

"Mr. Dibbs came here on an errand," said Aziel. "You," her manner a trifle condemnatory, "should not have been so quick to think that he meant us any harm. If you see him here again, come and tell me before you do anything so uncalled-for as this. I hope you did not strike him ?"

"Well, it's tellin' God's thruth, I always am," said Patrick, humbly raising his eyes, "an' it's not meself that can say exactly how it wor. But it 'minds me now I felt the full weight o' his skull agin me fist. Maybe his eye wathers a thrifle, but it's no harrum I did to his skull, I'm sure. Och hone ! it's me own blissed fist that's achin' now !"

"I am glad you did not seriously hurt him. But in order to prevent any mistakes hereafter, I wish you would remember that you must first let us know if you see anybody about the house ; then we will tell you what to do."

So saying, she bid him good-night as he stood there, puzzled and confused, trying to hide the obnoxious pistol out of her sight in a pocket far too small for it.

As for Dibbs, he was making his safety sure in flight, minus his hat and with several rents in his best suit of clothes. His right eye was indeed watering, if nothing worse, and fast closing, with a dull pain. He did not stop to investigate this injury—though something warm trickling down his face made him shudder at the thought of blood—but ran homeward nearly as fast as he had come. As he passed, with a fresh burst of speed, the hut of Nicholas Grundle, the door opened for an instant, and out of the one eye, which strained itself with astonishment, Dibbs saw, looking out from the half-open doorway, the form of the mysterious stranger—the same tall man who had come to the inn; the same dark face, only the beard was not so heavy now. It was just a glimpse he caught of the figure and the partly-averted face, for, as Dibbs came upon the rift of light that streamed out across the road, the man quickly drew backward and closed the door.

CHAPTER XIX.

PICKING THE VALISE.—OPENING THE CHEST.

NO miner digging for gold over the spot where he felt certain it was ever worked more industriously than did Nicholas Grundle at the locks that kept from him the secret of the valise. At first, with all his usual caution, he tried the little piece of bent wire in one of the sunken locks, leaving the padlock till the last, when his success with the others should give him more confidence with this, which he saw at a glance was a padlock of no ordinary pattern. But the smaller locks proved as formidable to his skill as the larger one might have done. Twist the end of the wire in whatever shape he might, and turn it within the hole in whatever direction or angle he could, he made no impression upon either of them; and the longer he worked, the more stubbornly they resisted the slightest betrayal of their mechanism.

“He has got safe-locks on his valise,” he muttered,

with a cunning smile, stopping for a moment to rest his hands and wipe away the perspiration which covered his forehead. "But the greater the treasure, the greater the caution. Yes, yes! Gold is hidden here. Not less than twenty thousand dollars, I am sure. I wonder if it is in bags, in large or small pieces, new or old coin? If I could only get a look at it! So much gold under my very eyes, and I not even see it!"

He said this with a vexatious shake of his head as he seized the handle of the valise and rocked it violently to and fro, as if to vent his anger upon it for the stubbornness with which it kept its secret. Then, trying his skill again, he put the wire into the padlock and slowly turned it around, bending closely over the lock and listening intently for the faintest click within its works. But he was no more successful with this than with the others—in fact, less so; for while he was pressing the wire against a point which vibrated a trifle under his touch the wire suddenly snapped, and to his dismay on pulling it out he found the broken piece was left in the lock. It was in vain that he tried to get this fragment out of the lock by shaking it in all directions. The piece had become wedged in tightly, wherever it was, and refused to leave its hiding-place. He tried to reach it with the wire, moving it as cautiously as his trembling hands would permit; but he could not get the fragment, which, with that singular perversity common to all inanimate things, seemed fully determined to remain where it was, to tell of his tampering with the lock.

Nicholas Grundle stood in a quandary now, silently cursing the lock and the wire—the one for its complexity, the other for its frailty; and his disappointment at not being able to see the contents of the valise was all the greater because of such trivial impediments to his success. No use to work over the valise any longer, he thought; for even if he succeeded in picking the smaller locks, that could be of no service to him, with this padlock still successfully defying him. So returning the wire to the drawer whence he had taken it, he locked the drawer and hid the key beneath the chest. Then, replacing the valise in the corner, he flung the carpet over it, and with

a sigh of disappointment as earnest as any expression of feeling he had ever uttered he drew aside the window-curtains. Finally, after wandering aimlessly about the room, he sat down in his chair in front of the fireplace, where a few half-dead embers blinked up at his moody gaze. The old man was greatly disgusted with his failure at lock-picking. He had hoped to fully explore the recesses of the valise, from which even now he could not wholly keep his eyes. To gratify his avaricious curiosity he now knew he must wait until the return of the stranger, and run the chance of seeing him display the hidden wealth of the valise, or a portion of it at least. For he shrewdly said to himself that if the stranger consented to buy the farm he should make him pay down a goodly sum as earnest-money this very evening.

"Not a bad idea, that!" he muttered, rubbing his hands, chilly through nervousness, over the faint heat of the hearth. "I will make him sign an agreement to buy, and he shall give me five hundred dollars in advance. No matter what he wants it for, I will sell it to him," he chuckled. "Twenty thousand dollars for forty acres of land! Of course it is good land. Oh yes, very, very fertile! You can raise any amount of hopes on it; and hopes are not a bad crop to raise."

He struck his knees and cackled away with a shrill laugh such as had not shook his shriveled frame for many a year. But—and the thought made him suddenly serious—suppose the man should change his mind and refuse to buy? What then? That was evidently a very important question, and Nicholas Grundle tried to answer it, leaning forward with his hands clasped in his lap, his eyebrows knitted close together, beneath which shone the gleam of his avaricious eyes, that strayed, as he pondered, toward the corner where lay the treasure which already he had almost come to consider his own. Oddly, too, as his eyes rested upon the valise, it suddenly occurred to him that it was just over the very spot in the cellar where that other treasure was, which no eyes but his own had seen, and no other hands had touched. What more natural than that he should add the two together in his mind? What a large sum they made! His head was a trifle giddy as the

total product of their figures impressed itself with a slight electric shock upon his brain, and finally danced before his eyes with a kaleidoscopic vision of its purchasing power. It might have been that his head was a little turned by the dazzling prospect which this sudden doubling of his wealth opened up to him, else why had the avaricious gleam in his eyes deepened so soon, and his features grown rigid with a determination that crept over him, at first with the trifle of a shudder, but anon left him trembling and excited, but resolved in his purpose? He rose stealthily from his chair and glanced out of the window that commanded the village road. It was as lifeless as the sterile fields that bounded it on either side. Then, with a noiseless step, walking on tip toe, as was his custom when he sought to hide the direction of his movements in the cellar, he went over to the corner where his gun stood.

Taking up the weapon, he examined it carefully, and then, as if not wholly satisfied, he withdrew the charge and replaced it with another, and put on a fresh cap, which he selected with more than ordinary care. This done, he suddenly set the gun back in its place, and with a confident smile began to walk slowly about the room, evidently working himself up into a fever of resolution, and keeping his eyes almost constantly upon the valise, coming closely to it every time he made the circuit of the apartment. While thus engaged he heard the bark of the dog as it came running up the garden-path, and an instant later he caught the sound of the girl's slower footsteps, which now stopped, as if she were hesitating about entering the house.

"She is coming home with a heavy heart," he said with somewhat of compassion in his voice as he hastened toward the door to unfasten it. "The feet go slowly indeed when the heart is sad. But she will get over this disappointment. The less we talk about it, the sooner she will forget; so I will not question her. She shall tell me only what she pleases to relieve her mind. Poor child! I do pity her. He did certainly bewitch her with his glowing vows and bright pictures of his love for her. His love! Bah! What does a boy know of love? No more than he knows of that greater enigma, life itself."

With a kindly smile he opened the door, and saw her standing before him. She started a trifle as her eyes timidly met his, but, gradually assured by his mild countenance, she came slowly forward and stood silently beside him.

"It was a long walk," he said, laying his hand caressingly upon her shoulder, "and your little feet have gone over it very fast. But I missed you very much, my child. Ah! when you are out of my sight, it seems as if the minutes change into hours."

Gently drawing her close to him, he kissed her lips and looked softly down into her eyes, where was the faint glistening of recent tears.

"Did she speak harshly to you?" he asked, stroking back her hair and patting her cheek. "She had no right to do that. It was not your fault that you could keep the locket no longer."

"No, father; she was very kind to me," she murmured, half concealing her face upon his breast. "She is a sweet woman. She talked to me as kindly as if I were her own child."

"That was very good of her," he said after a pause, during which a look of perplexity had come upon his face. "She did not blame you, then?"

"No. She—she blamed him," was the hesitating answer, which came with a sigh, followed by a little sob, which would have been quickly followed by others had he not suddenly changed the current of her thoughts.

"Well, we will talk no more about it," he said, turning with her into the house. "Let us forget it for a while. Some other time you shall tell me, if you choose, what she said to you. Just now we will try to be happy here in our little home. It may not be long before we leave it for a brighter and a better one. So, while we do stay here, where we have been so happy together—you and I, my child—let us be happy as we have always been. You will try to be so, will you not?" he went on coaxingly, drawing her closely to him, patting her under the chin and pinching her cheeks with an odd laugh of encouragement.

"I will try to be happy," she sighed, looking down and away from him to hide the quivering of her lips. "But, father dear," turning up to him a timorous glance, "you

will not be angry with me if I am not happy right away? It is so hard—”

He playfully interrupted her by putting his hand upon her mouth—a way he had of correcting her from her childhood. “There, there, my dear child!” he said. “You need not say another word; your father understands it all. You must forget, and I must forget. We must both together forget that you deceived me and I was angry with you for it. I am not angry with you now. No, no! What you have done this morning has made you dearer to me than ever. Don’t you see how different I am from what I was when you went away? Look at your poor old father’s face!” he broke out with a gayety of manner she had never seen before, catching her hands in his, and, with his arms extended, dancing a few light steps in front of her and laughing the louder the more surprised she looked. “Why, I am as happy as happy can be!” he cried, dropping her hands, and clapping his own in time with his fantastic footsteps.

She looked at him in mute wonderment, forgetting for the moment her own sad thoughts as she saw her father capering about the room with a glee that increased with every step he took.

“Now don’t you see how happy I am?” he laughed, caracoling toward her. He tossed aside her hood and shawl, and catching her about the waist whirled her around the room with him with an abandon of spirits that overturned the chairs and made Cæsar add his barking to the general tumult. Out of breath, he stopped at last and sank into his chair, and motioned her to come and sit beside him.

“My child,” he said, after he had gained something of his usual composure, “I see you are wondering what makes me so happy. Well, I cannot tell you all just now. Of course I am pleased because you are so loving and kind and obedient to me, but that, while it is a part, is not the whole reason, of my joy. There is good fortune in store for us, and for you more than for me. I can see it coming. Yes, yes, I can see it coming. We have not much longer to wait for it—not much longer to wait. The months go fast now—very fast!”

Here his speech, which had slowly become more hesitating, died away, and he fell into one of his silent 'and thoughtful moods, his hand resting fondly upon her head, which had pillowed itself upon his knee while he had been speaking. Several moments thus passed, when he suddenly came out of his reverie, and exclaimed, rising from his chair,

"Dear me, my child! Why, we have almost forgotten our dinner! The sun has been shining through yonder window an hour, and tells us that, hurry as we may, we shall be late at least twice that length of time. For to-day we must have a good dinner—yes, the best dinner the old cottage can give us! And now, my little housekeeper, what shall we have for dinner?"

"What would *you* like to have?" she asked.

For this was the question he had taught her to put to him before every meal since the old housekeeper had been laid away in yonder yard. And he, too, had always kept the key of the closet where the household stores were, from which he doled out as he thought best a scanty basis for the coming meal. Surprised indeed, then, was she to hear him say, as he put the closet key in her hand,

"You shall provide the dinner yourself. It's time that you took charge of everything about the house. You are getting to be a woman, and from this day on I give into your hands the management of all our household affairs. Yes, yes! you are now my little woman-child. You must take as good care of me as I have of you," he added with a playful shake of his forefinger as he kissed her and bid her hurry with the meal.

This new responsibility—one which she had often longed to have, and which now she found so unexpectedly thrust upon her—seemed to suddenly lighten her heart. With a little burst of childish joy she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him, and told him how happy now she was in feeling that she was to care for him, and how sure she was that she could do everything about the house to please him. Then she asked him to sit in his chair and watch her while she got ready, all by herself, the meal they were to eat. He let her lead him to his old arm-chair, which she placed by the fireplace, where he

could see her every movement. Beating up the cushion, she set him down gently in the seat with so much of a motherly air that he smiled and shook his head with many an approving nod, and said.

“That’s right, my little woman-child ! You know just how to care for me. Your old father has been blind until to-day, that he did not see how much better than himself you can care for him.” Pushing back the stray locks from his forehead and stroking his cheeks, much as if he had been a child and she a woman grown, she bid him keep his eyes upon her and see how well she could do in this her first attempt at housekeeping. So while she busied herself in her new work his eyes, except when they were diverted by a sudden glance at the valise, followed her with many a look of pride. Now and then he clapped his hands and told her how well she was doing as he saw the fire burning briskly on the hearth, the vegetables and the meat preparing, and the table growing more and more inviting under the white cloth and the bright dishes, whose location she now and then changed as her eye caught a better effect. Thus the hour passed more happily to her than had any hour she had ever remembered beneath this roof ; and when she drew his chair up to the well-spread table, and he said he could not have believed she was so smart had he not seen it with his own eyes, she could not repress the tears of joy that welled up from her happy heart.

The cottage of Nicholas Grundle had never seen so good a dinner, nor so generous a one. There were mutton-chops broiled to a turn ; boiled potatoes ready to fall apart with their flaky whiteness ; roasted sweet potatoes steaming hot ; and hominy creamy-white with milk and butter. A pitcher of milk was there, and a plate of sliced bread, which seemed to be ogling the little plate of butter that stood opposite it, and in the centre of the table was a glass dish which Emily had found in the closet, and in which she had placed some red-cheeked apples, decorating them with some bright fall leaves she had gathered that day. Never was a meal in the cottage eaten with so much pleasure as was this. The old man never was so talkative, never in so good a humor. He praised every

dish, and pronounced the cooking the best he had ever tasted. He told stories of his younger days—a period in his life she had never heard him mention until now—and laughed immoderately at these reminiscences of his boyhood, until Cæsar, who had been watching the table closely, occasionally receiving a mouthful from Emily, could no longer restrain his glee, and ran around the room, jumping up and barking first at Emily, then at her father.

“Why, even the dog is in good humor to-day!” cried the old man, patting him on the head and giving him a bone. “And well he may be! Ah, Cæsar, you rascal! you know there is good fortune coming to us. Yes, you do, you rogue!”

The dog, as if indeed this kind treatment of his master was good enough fortune for him, licked his hand and kept up his gambols about the table.

When at last the meal was over, the table cleared and the dishes put away in the closet, where Emily arranged them in better order than they had ever been, her father called her up into his room, in which he had been quietly busy about something this last half hour. She quickly ascended the little open staircase, wondering why he had summoned her there—for his room, locked at all hours, had always been a sealed apartment to her—and her wonderment only increased when, on entering the door, she saw him standing by an old oaken chest, upon the open sides and back of which were displayed many bright pieces of silks and velvets, sprays of artificial flowers, streamers of delicate laces, brilliant shawls of various thicknesses and texture, and several rare and motley skins. She was astonished indeed at the sight of such an array of queenly apparel. Whose might it be? She could not speak or move, and her eyes were riveted upon this little world of beauty before her, which seemed to her to be the creation of some fairy spell. The old man evidently enjoyed her amazement, for he uttered no word himself, but with a face as glowing and excited as her own watched, with a merry twinkle in his eyes, the startling effect of this display.

“What are they? Whose are they?” she managed to whisper out, coming a pace or two nearer him and laying

her hand upon his arm with a tremor of excitement which pleased him all the more.

"Whose are they?" he exclaimed, leading her close to the chest and pointing to its contents with a look of pride. "Why, they are yours, my child—all yours."

"Mine?" she slowly said, gazing at him with a dazed look of inquiry.

"Yes, all yours. See here!" he continued, taking from the bottom of the chest a roll of heavy white satin, upon which was laid a fleecy veil and a spray of orange-blossoms. "What is this? You are old enough now to know. Ah! I see my woman-child has been thinking ahead."

He shook his head wisely as she bent over the parcel and gazed at it with sparkling eyes, a bated, fluttering breath and cheeks that grew white and red by turns.

"A wedding-dress!" she whispered, more to herself than to him, as she gently laid her hand upon it, and then shrank back with a little start and a face that had grown suddenly solemn.

"So it is, so it is; and your wedding-dress, too. Yes, yes! A wedding-dress for my woman-child. Ha, ha! Your old father thought ahead too, didn't he?"

Shaking his head from side to side, with a laugh of satisfaction he laid the dress back in the chest. Then he began to replace the other articles, holding each up to her happy gaze, saying,

"These are all yours too—every one of them. Ah! Nicholas Grundle's child, when she is a bride, shall be dressed equal to her station. Her poor old father has taken care of that. He has seen good fortune coming to her, and he is ready for it. You can go now," he said, turning abruptly to her as he closed the lid of the chest with a heavy sigh, and motioning her to the stairway. "Some other time I will talk to you more about this, but not now—no, not now, my child."

Despite his efforts to conceal his emotion, she detected the sad shadow on his face and noticed how tremulous and unsteady his voice had become.

She would have run to him and kissed him, but he silently waved her away and bid her leave him alone.

He would stay in his room a while this afternoon. She

must go down stairs and sit by the window that faced the village road, and call to him if the stranger she saw in the morning should come that way.

"Keep the doors locked," he said: "open them to no one. You must help me now to watch over our treasures. They are your treasures as well as mine. You have not yet seen them all, my child, but you shall some day. Yes, some day," he went on musingly, "and that day will be soon enough for you, but too soon for me, I know—too soon for me."

In obedience to another beckoning wave of his hand she descended the stairs, her mind in a maze of mystery. She seated herself at the window, and tried to reduce her thoughts to some system and draw some satisfactory conclusions from what she had seen and heard. The more she questioned herself as to the meaning of this sudden change of her father in his conduct toward her and why he had shown her the contents of the chest, the less she could understand it all.

CHAPTER XX.

AN EVENING IN THE MISER'S COTTAGE.

IT was a very short afternoon to Emily, although she sat by the window keeping watch as her father had bidden her, with no companions save her busy thoughts and Cæsar, who lay restless at her feet, one of his great eyes blinking up at her, while the other seemed to be stealthily watching the valise in yonder corner. Overhead she heard her father bustling about his room, now moving some heavy object across the floor, now opening and closing the lid of some box or trunk, and again keeping still for many minutes, as if he were deeply engaged in a secret work that kept his every movement quiet. Once she heard him laughing in a half-subdued manner to himself, and then breaking out into a merry song, to which he kept time with his hands and feet. What did it all mean? She asked herself so many

times that her brain grew weary with the unanswered question. She had never before seen him in this strange humor—so gay and serious, so open and secretive, by turns. What had come over him to work such a sudden change in his speech and conduct? Had the advent of the stranger anything to do with it? And if so, what? Who could he be? and what did he carry in that odd-looking box over there? What was he saying to her father when she came around the corner of the house and found them together? What, too, was this good fortune her father had said was coming to them so soon? These and many other questions crowded upon her mind as she sat by the window watching. But to each and every one she could find no answer. The more she strove to solve the mystery of her father's conduct, the more incomprehensible did it become to her.

At last, wearied out with the effort, she laid her aching head upon her hand and gazed down the village road, along which as yet had passed nothing save two farmers' wagons, whose occupants, as they drew near the cottage, whipped up their teams and dashed quickly by, as if influenced by some superstitious fear of the place. Across the distant tree-tops came the glow of the setting sun. As he slowly descended into his gorgeous couch of crimson and purple clouds he cast back, through an intervening gorge in the woods, a bright parting beam, which fell like a good-night smile upon the form of the girl, bathing her face and hair in a soft light as mellow as the glance of her eyes. Ah! what but meditations of love could make her eyes linger upon this slowly-fading landscape with such a tender yearning in them? Were not her thoughts going after him who had left her faster even than the beams of golden light that flashed up from the setting sun and stretched their feathery forms far out upon the evening sky? She asked herself no questions now. Her heart was as tranquil as that of the eventide, which was bringing the ever-welcome rest of night upon the world. To sit thus and think of *him*, and call to mind with a readiness of memory such as lovers only have every look he had ever given her, every word he had spoken in those brief days when he was so kind to

her, was the sweetest joy her heart could wish, though his parting threw a shadow of sadness over it all. Thus, with a pure and unselfish love guiding her every thought of him, the moments passed, filling her soul with a more vivid image of him, until his presence seemed so near that her heart fluttered with joy. Now the hope grew brighter—she knew not why—that he still loved her; that he would not forget her; that, if she had wounded his feelings, he would forgive her and tell her again that he loved her. How she longed to be with him, so lonesome must he be traveling by himself so far away! She clasped her little hands and earnestly raised her eyes, in which the tears glistened like the stars that now began to twinkle down upon her. Then, with a look of earnest, childish confidence, her trembling lips breathed out for him a prayer so sweet and tender that if an angel had passed that way he would have thought her some celestial soul imprisoned on earth a while.

It was in this attitude, her hands still clasped and her face looking upward with a simple faith that brought heaven as near to her as if it were within the hearing of her whispered prayer, that her father found her. She had been so absorbed that she had not heard his light footsteps as he descended the stairs and came softly toward her. It was only when he laid his hand gently upon her head and spoke kindly to her that she became aware of his presence. Even then, despite the softness of his manner, she started, a little affrighted to find him standing thus suddenly beside her; for a shooting-star had crossed the heavens the instant before, and she had audibly uttered a wish for it to carry to God—a superstition her father had once read to her from a quaint old book.

“Is my little woman-child trying to read the stars, seeking to find out her destiny from them?” he asked, bending over her and caressing her hair, which had fallen away from its fastenings, and, like a cloud of gold, rested upon her shoulders. “Well, there is fortune in the stars,” he said, with an encouraging nod of his head, as he looked out upon the heavens, slowly growing brighter in the clear, frosty air of the approaching night; “and good fortune, too, I am sure, when they shine so brightly as

now. Yes, the stars smile gloriously upon us to-night, and write our coming good fortune in letters of silver upon the eternal parchment of the sky. But come; it is time we shut out the world, and night as well," opening the window and fastening tight the thick wooden shutter. "Let the stars keep watch over us while we spend the evening together in talking of that brighter future which will as surely dawn upon us as will rise the sun again on the morrow."

She rose from her seat with a happy trustfulness in her heart that reflected a calm smile upon her face, and set about preparing their evening meal with a little bustle of energy, as if she would make amends for the lateness of the hour. First she closed the other window-shutters; then, throwing a handful of brushwood upon the smouldering coals, she again placed her father's arm-chair beside the chimney-corner and seated him comfortably in it. Now, while the quickly-kindling fire flashed its beams across her happy face, she lighted a candle, and with deft hands and light steps began her pleasant task. It was not long before the table was ready with its frugal meal of mush and milk—a dish he loved beyond all others.

"You see, father dear," she said, leading him at length to the table, "that I have remembered what you said—a light supper makes a heavy sleep."

"Right, right, my child!" he replied with an approving pat upon her cheek, which seemed to have caught the warm, steady glow of the fire. "You are learning fast to go alone in your care for me. Rich food does indeed make bad dreams. Yet this dish is good enough for a king and a queen. Indeed, to go no farther for true royalty, are we not king and queen together?—I the king whom you obey, and you the queen whom I love. Ha, ha! my child, we have a little empire here all our own—happier in our possessions than other kings and queens have ever been!" Then, growing a trifle serious, he suddenly added, "But we shall soon add to our little empire, for the good fortune is coming soon. I can see it, and you have read it this night in the stars."

Thus he rattled on through the meal, his talk divided between their present condition of contentment and their

future lot, which was to be greater far in all its means of happiness. She listened to him as intently and as pleased as if he were telling her one of those wondrous tales of enchantment with which he had beguiled the lonesome hours for her in her younger days. At last he came to an abrupt halt in his speech, and rising from the table bid her make haste and clear it away.

"I had almost forgotten the stranger," he said, pulling out of his pocket an odd, old silver watch. "It is nearly half-past seven o'clock. He may be here at any moment, for he seems like a strange bird, flying at random. So make haste, little housekeeper, that we may be ready to receive him in order. We will give him no chance to pry into our ways of living. He lives most securely who lets the stranger's eye see little."

He seated himself by the fire and watched the burning of two small sticks, which he laid upon the andirons with a hesitating motion, and with something of his old grudging air. Meanwhile, the girl worked as swiftly as even his impatience could wish, though he looked repeatedly at his watch and leaned more than once out of his chair, with his hand to his ear, listening for some sound he thought he heard along the road or nearer to the house. All without was still; there was sound of neither man nor beast, wagon nor footstep. Even Cæsar, to whom had fallen the remnants of the supper, lay at peace, crouched by the fireside, not moving a muscle; only his eyes, turned in the direction of the valise, blinked with a distrustful watchfulness, as if, forsooth, it might suddenly throw off its carpet covering and spring toward him. At length Emily finished her work, and giving the last touches of order to the room, she took her knitting from a little basket on the mantel-shelf and seated herself beside her father. She looked in his face for a smile of approval, and asked, as she nestled closely to his side,

"Am I a good little housekeeper, father? Do I do everything just as you want me to? I shall do better, I know, every day if you will only trust me and be as pleased as you are now." He laid his hand upon her head, and bending down kissed her, saying, a touch of pathos in his voice,

"I have been watching you, Emily—I cannot say with more of joy than of sorrow, for now I see that you have indeed passed from the dependency of childhood, which was my greatest joy with you, to a motherly care of myself which tells me full well that I shall hereafter need you more than you will me. Yes, yes! My pleasure now must be in receiving that care which you have outgrown, but which I shall need more and more as these old hands grow feebler and these limbs follow you with tottering steps. Ah me! How the years have gone by! It seems but a little while ago I dandled you upon these knees and put you to sleep in these very arms. Now you are a little woman, as tall as your father—ay, stronger even than he, and with form and features as full and fresh as his are shriveled and sunken."

There came the sound of footsteps on the walk, and Cæsar, who an instant before had quickly raised his head to listen, now bounded toward the door with a bark that turned into a series of low, fierce growls, as if he had already recognized the comer as one who ought to receive no welcome from him.

"It is the stranger," said the old man, speaking to Emily in a voice that was low, yet tremulous with agitation. "Call the dog away. Go with him to your room, and stay there till I call you. I have business with this man which we can best settle alone. Close your door, too, and however curious you may be, do not listen to what we say, for I would rather tell you myself, after he has gone, what brought him here. This much I can say," noticing the rift of alarm that crossed her face: "he comes on no evil errand."

With an obedience as ready as it was trusting, Emily spoke to the dog, who came slowly toward her, still growling his displeasure. Kissing her father with a tenderness of apprehension, she lighted a candle and hastened up stairs, followed by Cæsar. Entering her room, she closed the door with a trembling hand and sank down in her chair with Cæsar at her feet, her heart beating with a strange and undefined fear that even her belief in her father's confident words could not wholly allay.

Meanwhile, whoever might be outside, he was standing

impatiently upon the step and rapping with loud, peremptory knocks upon the door, as one would do who had the right of entering unquestioned. It was a series of raps, bold and honest, he gave, not the sly, hesitating taps of one who, on villainy intent, by quiet approach would seek to make his entrance easier. Nicholas Grundle had crept on tip toe to the door, and now asked, in a voice that had a wonderful assumption of steadiness in it,

"Who's there?"

"It is the man who left the valise with you," came back the reply in that voice of peculiar evenness of tone which the miser recognized, and without further delay took down the bar, partially opened the door, and peered out upon the face that greeted him with a sedate smile of recognition.

"Come in," said Grundle, slowly throwing wide the door as the man entered, and quickly barring it again. "You are late in coming, but not unwelcome. Take a seat beside the fire," he said, shuffling across the room and drawing up a chair opposite his own, to which he motioned his companion.

"The valise is safe, I see," said the man, glancing toward the corner, as he threw aside his cloak and hat, and then, briskly rubbing his hands, seated himself in the proffered chair. "Whew! How good the fire is!" he continued, leaning forward and extending his hands close to the ruddy blaze. "Now, this is genuine comfort and cosiness," looking around the room with an air of admiration. "A chilly night outside, but a blazing open fire within and a good roof overhead. Ah, Mr. Grundle! one can get a great deal of solid satisfaction out of life if he would only cultivate contentment with even a humble lot, as you seem to have done. But the girl—the young lady—your child?" he added, looking again around the apartment with a disappointed expression which he made no attempt to conceal. "Am I too late to see her beautiful face again?"

"She went to bed some time ago," said the other with a sudden reserve in his manner. "Her motto is like mine: 'Early to bed and early to rise—'"

"Let me add," interrupted the man, with a light laugh,

“that I hope the rest of the couplet will come true of you both—‘healthy, wealthy and wise’—to the end of your days. In one of these respects I can help you,” he went on, more seriously, glancing for an instant with a knowing expression at his valise. “For, not to longer keep you in suspense, I have concluded to buy your farm, and at your own price—cash down, five hundred dollars per acre; and what is still more to your advantage, the parties for whom I am making the purchase will not take possession of the property before spring. You can have the free use of the place till then.”

“But you will pay me for it now—as soon as we can get the papers ready?” asked the old man, well concealing his anxiety and eagerness by gazing with forced calmness at the fire, while he drummed lightly on the arms of his chair, as if the question he had asked were a mere trifle of business.

“Certainly; the money will pass between us as soon as the deed is signed,” was the reply, given with a reassuring promptness. “To facilitate matters, I have no objection to your village lawyer drawing the deed. I understand he is a good one. To show you that I mean business, prompt and conclusive, here is my card. You can let him insert this name in the deed.”

Grundle took the card, and leaning toward the fire read, half aloud, the following, printed with all the flourishes of the typographical art:

“J. LAWRENCE ADAMS,
Commercial Agent,
Penna. Railroad Co.,
Philada.”

“Humph!” he said, turning over the card carelessly and assuming an indifferent attitude, though his keen eyes sparkled and his wrinkles smoothed out a trifle with an insinuating smile. “So you are buying the property for the railroad? In that case, they ought to pay me more for it. They can afford it! What’s twenty thousand dollars to them, when they are buying all an old man has in the world?”

“You do not surprise me,” returned the other with an

audible smile, stroking his moustache with the jeweled hand, on which the serpent-ring shone brighter than ever. "I knew you would want more when you learned who the purchasers are. Railroads are considered legitimate plunder in our days, and men who would disdain to commit an ordinary theft rob corporations with equanimity. Now, to be frank with you, I am offering you more than I am afraid the company will sanction when I report to them to-morrow. I have been prompted to make you this offer, although the price seems to me very exorbitant, because I thought it would induce you to part with the land without any higgling as to price or continued opposition to sell, which latter case would for the present materially interfere with our plans, although we could eventually change them with little difficulty, for there are other places in this vicinity that would probably suit my clients fully as well as yours."

"Take the land, then, at your own price," was the old man's surly rejoinder as he flung out his hand with an impatient gesture. "Who asked you to give more for it? I didn't. I only said you might add a little to the price, since the money you are paying is not yours. If you would, I might divide a nice little sum with you;" and he raised his eyes to the man with a look of deep and meaning cunning.

"A very tempting offer. I am sorry, both for your sake and mine, I cannot accept it. So, if you are not pleased with my terms, we had better let the subject drop. Perhaps you can dispose of your land to a better advantage in some other way."

"Didn't I say the land was yours at your own price? How many more times do you want my word to pass the bargain? Here! If you mean business as I do, read that paper, and see whether you will sign it." He took from the pocket of his faded and tattered coat a folded sheet of paper, which he opened with a brisk air and handed to his companion. The man, holding the paper so that the light of the fire fell upon it, read it carefully, and then, glancing over its top at the other, who had been keenly watching him, said,

"This is an agreement on my part to buy your farm as

soon as the deed can be made out. It also calls for an immediate payment of five hundred dollars as earnest-money. A carefully-written and legally-worded document. Did you draw it?"

"No matter who drew it. Will you sign it? That's the point to be settled now. I never admire an agreement until it is signed."

"Of course I will sign it!" laughed the man, good-naturedly; "and pay you the money in a cheque, or gold, or notes, just as you prefer. Have you pen and ink here?"

"Here they are," said Grundle, rising from his chair with sudden alacrity, his face covered with a greedy, eager smile, and taking from the mantel an old inkstand and pen, which he placed upon the table, under the dim light of the candle, which he snuffed into a feeble glow. The man wrote his name in a bold, vigorous hand, and then, turning to the other, asked,

"Who will be our witness to this document? Ah, a happy thought! Your daughter might sign it—"

"No need of any witness," interrupted Grundle, with a quick negative shake of his head. "When men intend to stand by their bargain, as you and I do, there is no need of a witness to their promise."

"Well, just as you say," rising from the table, and handing Grundle the paper, which he carefully folded and put back into his pocket. "Now for the money. How will you have it—in gold or notes? For I fear a cheque would not have enough of the appearance of money for you."

"I'll take it in gold. That fills the eye as well as the hand. It always seems to me more like money than anything else."

"So it does," laughed the stranger, tapping the old man familiarly on the shoulder; "and you shall have it fresh and shining from the mint, in bright pieces, unstained by the tears of poverty and unsoiled by the greedy grasp of avarice."

He went to his valise, threw off the carpet, and, taking a bundle of keys from his pocket, proceeded to open it; and while he was doing this Nicholas Grundle suddenly busied himself about the fire, stirring up the

coals, and putting on a small stick or two with far more noise and exertion than seemed necessary, and all the time his eyes kept up their furtive glances upon the stranger's movements.

"Something is the matter with this padlock," said the man, turning to Grundle after several ineffectual attempts to turn the key.

The old man went on stirring the fire with increased vigor, all at once strangely oblivious to everything else in the room.

"I cannot open my valise," said the stranger in a loud voice, coming toward the fireplace and laying his hand on Grundle's arm to attract his attention. "The lock is broken. I shall have to pay you in greenbacks."

"Eh? Lock broken! greenbacks!" exclaimed the old man turning round, as he dropped the poker and faced the other with a look of dazed inquiry. "How—how did you break it?"

"Turned the key too quickly, I guess. But it doesn't matter to-night, if you will take greenbacks. I will exchange them for gold to-morrow when I sign the deed, if you have it ready at that time."

"It will be ready to-morrow. Too bad about the lock! I will take greenbacks to-night."

Again he took up the poker, and began to rearrange the fire with a look of relief and satisfaction. The man, he thought, had not suspected him, and would doubtless leave the valise still longer in his charge.

"Here is your money;" and as Grundle, comprehending more readily now, turned slowly around, the stranger, taking from a large wallet several crisp, unfolded bills, placed them in his hand. "There are five one-hundred-dollar bills. Am I right?"

"Yes," slowly returned Grundle, his trembling hands going over the notes one by one, which rattled in his excited grasp as he thrust them deep into his pocket. "But you will exchange them for gold to-morrow?"

"Certainly! But," looking at his watch, "it is getting late. I must go: I have quite a distance before me. By the by, can I leave this valise here until to-morrow?"

"I have no objection," was the indifferent response. "I guess it will be safe here."

"Yes; but hardly safe in that corner, should any one break into your house. Let me see: where can we hide it?" looking slowly about the room, and finally fixing his eyes upon the cellar-door. "Oh, there is the cellar; suppose we put it down there? No one would ever think of looking in the cellar for valuables, even if he suspected you had any about the house."

As he finished speaking, he made a movement toward the cellar-door, as if to open it.

"It will be just as safe where it is," said Grundle, a trifle of sharpness in his tremulous voice, the only thing about him that betrayed agitation, so well was he controlling himself at this moment, which he felt to be so critical for the guarding of his hidden treasure. "Besides, the cellar-door is locked, and my child has the key. It is not worth while to waken her for it."

"I should certainly be very sorry to disturb her sweet dreams for anything trivial," returned the man with an apologetic wave of his hand. "But, seriously, I much prefer to leave the valise hidden away in your cellar, for I don't hesitate to tell you that it contains that which if lost would ruin me. You would very much oblige me, and put me at my ease for the night, if you would accede to my wishes. Perhaps your daughter is not asleep. If not, you can readily get the key without disturbing her—no more, indeed, than our talking this evening may have done."

"Do I not tell you the valise is safe where it is? If you do not believe me, and cannot trust it for the night where it has been all day, you had better take it with you."

Shaking his head stubbornly, the old man began to shuffle about the room, setting the chairs back, and making other movements about the fire and windows that should suggest to his guest that he was impatient for his departure.

"Well, good-night, friend Grundle!" said the man, after a pause, during which he had been covertly examining the cellar-door, and noted the strong lock upon it.

"We will leave the valise where it is. I am satisfied that it will be safe enough. To-morrow afternoon I shall be here, if you say you will have the deed ready. We can then go to the village and have it properly witnessed."

"The deed shall be ready," replied the old man with an emphatic shake of his head. "Only see to it that you are. You can bring the notary here. I am too old to go to the village on foot."

There came the sound of running footsteps along the village road. Grundle started a little, and looked nervously toward his gun, advancing cautiously to where it stood as the sound came nearer.

"Don't be alarmed," said the man, waving him back. "It's only some country lover chased by his shadow, I'll warrant you."

He opened the door and peered out just as the form of a young man darted by the house, but not so quickly that the stranger failed to recognize him, for he caught a glimpse of the scared face of the barkeeper whom he had met at the village inn.

"Who was it?" asked Grundle, with his gun in his hand, as the man closed the door. "Has he gone?"

"Yes, and far out of sight by this time, even if it were daylight, so that we could look after him. Well, I think I will follow him, but not so rapidly."

With a parting shake of the old man's hand, which he felt was cold and trembling, the stranger bade him good-night and went out. He had hardly left the step before the door was closed upon him, and he heard the wooden bar fall with a heavy thud into its sockets.

"Let him bar his door," chuckled the man as he turned into the main road in an opposite direction to the village. "So much safer will his treasure be for him to-night, and for me when—I choose to take it. So he keeps his money in the cellar! I'll warrant it's hidden behind some stone in the wall, or in a box covered with rubbish. I know I could lay my hand upon it, for the cunning method of its concealment would leave some tell-tale trace. Deceived old man! He has been trying to pick the locks of my valise, and thinks by his innocent manner when I was trying the key he warded off any suspicions I might have

had of him. How stubborn he was about opening the cellar-door! Of course I was sure, from his forced calmness betraying itself in look and gesture, that there was no other reason for not opening it than that he hadn't the key. Crafty, indeed, he is; but after all his artfulness he deceives himself more than any one else, especially poor, innocent J. Lawrence Adams!"

And with a smothered laugh of satisfaction, which would have made Nicholas Grundle quake with fear had he heard it, the man walked rapidly on until he came almost up to the farm-house. Here he stopped several moments, and debated, with a malicious smile, whether he should pay the inmates another of his unwelcome visits. There were two reasons that urged him to do so—his pure love of deviltry and his desire to find out what had been the barkeeper's errand there; for he had instantly surmised, on seeing Dibbs run past the cottage, that he had been at the farm-house. At last he decided to forego both the pleasure of one of these reasons and the interest of the other.

"There is nothing for me to gain by seeing them to-night. Better for my present purpose, in fact, that they should think me miles away from here. As to that barkeeper spying around the house, as he has evidently been doing, why he will now be obliged to remain in ignorance of my identity for some time to come." Drawing his cloak closely about him, and pulling his hat far over his face, he continued on with a brisk walk down the road, like a dark shadow of evil stealing along in the still darker night.

CHAPTER XXI.

A FRIEND INDEED.

THE cars rapidly bore Volney Slade away from Slowville in no enviable state of mind. His passion had cooled; Reason had returned to taunt him with his foolishness, and well did she do it. Even the knowledge that he was at last free from the annoying presence of his stepfather, the drudgery of farm-life, and the fact that he

was about to seek his fortune in a great city, which had always been a charming prospect to him, could not give him one bit of happiness now. None of these considerations, which at any other time would have gladdened his heart, could bring the faintest smile of exhilaration or peace to his troubled countenance. He had quarreled with the girl he loved—yes, worshiped now, he knew, as the cars seemed with a malicious speed to bear him farther and farther from her, while his goaded fancy brought her nearer and nearer, until he could see her sad, reproachful face, from which he had turned away without so much as a parting glance of tenderness—nothing but a cold kiss, which made the lips that gave it quiver now with remorse. The more he thought of her—he could think of nothing else, and would not if he could—the more he blamed himself; the more he pitied her, the more he loved her, until he was so wrought up that he resolved to leave the train at the next stopping-place and hurry back on foot to her to ask her forgiveness and tell her that, despite the mean words he had spoken and the cruel way in which he had acted, he did love her with all his heart and trusted her love for him with all his soul.

Resolved on this as the only honorable course he could pursue and the speediest reparation he could make, he caught up his valise and went in search of the conductor. From him, to his dismay as well as disappointment, he learned that the train, being a through and not a local one, would make its first stop some forty miles away. Reluctantly indeed he went back to his seat and strove to calm his thoughts; but the more he tried the harder he found it to alleviate in the slightest the wretched memory of the injustice he had done. The patience with which she had borne it all added a doubly-keener edge to the poignancy of his remorse. Nor would his memory rest content with this tantalizing review of what he had done; but, with a strange pertinacity of willfulness, it brought rapidly to his vision every little incident of his acquaintance with her, until her form seemed to be beside him, and her voice, so sweet and trusting, ringing with a sad cadence in his very ears. It was in vain that, to quiet his mind, he told himself he would write a letter of repent-

ance to her as soon as he reached the city; that this letter he would send in the charge of Aziel Loyd, who would deliver it safely despite the keen watchfulness of Emily's father; and to this letter he should receive a speedy answer of forgiveness. His thoughts would not thus be calmed, but to this and every other scheme his busy brain suggested they opposed doubts and fears, until he fully experienced, to his unavailing sorrow, as the cars carried him farther away from the loving heart he had wounded, how much easier it is to do a wrong than to forget or retrieve it.

It was late in the afternoon when, wearied out with the conflict he had waged with his hopes and fears, he found a little peace in the determination that he would not only write Emily such a letter as should restore him again to her affections, but, to make sure of its lasting effect, he would, as soon as possible after securing his situation, go back to Slowville and ask her forgiveness face to face. In the endeavor to banish further consideration of the subject from his mind as much as he could, he went forward into the smoking-car. Here, lighting his cigar, he ensconced himself in a double seat, and devoted his thoughts, a trifle placid now, to the contemplation of the new life upon which he was about entering, and in which he was fully confident of achieving success. While thus engaged in castle-building, the smoke of his cigar curling upward among the lofty edifices of his dreams, he was interrupted by a slight tap upon his shoulder as a middle-aged man of rustic dress and appearance bluntly asked him to move along a little, and took a seat beside him.

"Car's rather crowded," said the man, taking out a briarwood pipe, which he leisurely proceeded to fill from a tobacco-pouch of chamois-skin curiously wrought with beads. Volney looked around, and saw that the car had indeed been filled since his entrance. Every seat was occupied, and the dense smoke told how vigorously, to say the least, the devotees of tobacco were enjoying the sending up of incense to its invisible shrine.

"Yes," he replied with more cordiality in his manner than with which he had at first received the stranger;

"the car is very full. I had no idea I was monopolizing the only unoccupied seat."

"That's all right. A man must look out himself for his comfort when traveling. When he can loll in two seats, he's a fool to sit straight up in one. Going down to the city, I suppose?" asking the question between the preliminary puffs of lighting his pipe, and turning his square, honest face on Volney.

"Yes; that is my destination. How far off from the city are we? It seems an endless ride to me."

"That's because you're anxious to get there," laughed the man, good-naturedly, leaning back in his seat, and evidently composing himself for a quiet time with his pipe; "all you have to do is to draw upon your patience another hour, and then you will find yourself in Philadelphia, where the streets are as straight as a yardstick and the houses as much alike as tombstones in a graveyard."

"You are evidently not an admirer of the place."

"Oh yes; I like it as well as I do any city," rejoined the other with a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders. "They are all alike, these cities—full of lying and deviltry. City folks live by lying, cheating and robbing. Give me the country people for good old-fashioned, honest dealing."

"Do you know much about Philadelphia?" asked Volney after a pause, during which he was congratulating himself upon having made the acquaintance of this man, who would be of service in directing him to some cheap and good hotel. "If so, perhaps you could tell me of a moderate-priced hotel where I could lodge to-night?"

"Go to the Bull's Head. That's where I stay. It's a house for farmers—plain food, clean rooms and comfortable beds; and it doesn't cost the price of a load of hay to stay there a day, either."

"Thank you! I will avail myself of your kind advice," said Volney, taking out a memorandum-book and writing down the name of the hotel. "Will you please give me the name of the street and the number?"

"No need of that. You can come along with me if

you choose. I will introduce you to the landlord, and that will get you one of the best rooms in the house."

Again Volney began to thank him for his courtesy, but the stranger put out his hand with a deprecating gesture.

"Now, don't thank me for doing a civil action," he said. "It's no more than I would expect you to do for me if I was coming to the city for the first time, as I suspect you are. Going to clerk it?"

"Not exactly. I am going to learn to be a machinist—that is, if I can."

"Well, if a man has any brains, he can learn to be almost anything—provided he sticks to it. Sticking to it is what tells in the long run. You don't look much like a mechanic, though. Been raised on a farm, like myself, I take it. Got tired of farming and going down to the city to try your luck. Eh?"

"You have described my case precisely," rejoined Volney, turning on his companion a look of admiration at the penetration he had displayed. "I am exchanging the farm for the factory, the plow for the spindle, and gladly, too. I wish, since you are so apt at guessing the past, you could tell me what kind of luck you think I will have in my new life."

"That I can easily do. Luck in business is the same as luck in farming, supposing you work hard in both cases. If you have good seed, good soil and good weather, you will have good luck with your crops. So, my friend, if you have a good situation, a good employer, and the times are good, you will have good luck. Do you want my advice?"

"Certainly, and very thankful I shall be for it," answered the young man, his admiration for the man deepening every moment, even as his gratitude increased.

"Well, here it is;" and as he spoke the farmer took his pipe from his mouth and shook his forefinger with a slow, impressive motion. "Work hard and keep your eyes open. Good luck will come to you in time, only you must be ready to seize your chance when it does come; for, remember, good luck, like lightning, never strikes twice in the same place. But pshaw! What's the use of my preaching to you? I guess your father gave you enough of that

before you left home. Besides, we were nearer the city than I thought when you asked me. See! here we are at Frankford. We shall be in Philadelphia in a very little while." Volney followed the direction of the man's finger, and as the train roared and dashed through the village he could just see, in the dusky distance, the twinkling glimmer of the city gaslights, pioneers alike of taxes and of life, stretching in long straight lines far out into the country, with scattered houses here and there to keep them company.

As he gazed at the quickly-moving panorama, and saw row after row of houses rise out of the gloom, and lofty steeples outlining themselves against the darkening sky like grim sentinels of the night, and the red flare of furnaces and factories, whose tall chimneys, blazing with a lurid light, seemed giant torches thrust toward heaven, a slight feeling of dread came over him at the thought that in this great place, where the lights of thousands of happy homes swept across his vision wherever he looked, he would be a stranger. Alone and in a great city! So many thousands, and not one friend! What solitude more dreadful! Meditating thus, his head sunk upon his hand, he pressed his face against the window and peered out upon the glaring street through which they went, so full of life and bustle and noise of men, women and children that he felt he was indeed a stranger in a strange land. Not a familiar face in all this throng that watched the train go by! Not a voice he had ever heard before!

"Come, my young friend!" said the man at his elbow as the cars slowly entered the dépôt. "Here we are. Hurry up if you want to get a good room at the Bull's Head! Got any baggage?"

"Yes; a valise. It is checked. It will only take me a few minutes to get it."

"All right," said the other, leading the way as they passed out of the car. Then, whispering, and giving Volney a mysterious nudge with his elbow as they walked along the platform, "Watch sharp and keep your hand on your pocket-book. Pickpockets around here thicker than crows in a cornfield."

Volney stopped short with a little start of terror. Robbed of his money! His hand quickly sought his pocket;

and grasping within it his wallet, he held it in a vise-like grip. Then he struggled through the crowd to catch up with his companion, who, with a carpet-bag held in front of him, was making his way rapidly, and eagerly looking about him as they passed into the main saloon, as if he were expecting to meet some one he knew.

"Come out this way," he said, catching hold of the young man's arm and hurrying him toward a side door. "They unload the baggage here," he continued as they stood outside the dépôt in a dimly-lighted side street where stretched long rows of freight-cars. "Besides, there's one of these city skinflints who says I owe him some money, and he's always on the watch for me when I come to the city. By going along this street I shall get out of his way. It isn't a fair debt, or I would have paid it long ago. But I expect I will have to pay it, though, if he should catch me to-night. He swore that if I didn't the next time he caught me in the city, he would have me arrested. Hello! it's no use dodging him. There he comes now, like a dog on full scent. Stand by me, and you will see what swindlers these city fellows are."

As he was speaking a thick-set, burly-looking fellow, who seemed to leap out of the darkness, came toward them with a menacing attitude. Shaking his fist and head at Slade's companion, he said,

"See here, farmer Jones, this thing of trying to get away from this dépôt without my seeing you is played out. I want you to come to time to-night. Mind, I am all ready for you if you don't! I have got a constable round the corner yonder, and I'll introduce him to you mighty quick unless you pay this bill," drawing a piece of letter-paper from his pocket and rattling it in the other's face.

"How much is the bill you claim against me, Mr. Street?" said the man addressed, becoming greatly agitated and turning a distressed face on Slade, whose earnest, sympathetic look and watchful attitude showed how deeply he was interested.

"You know well enough how much it is. Forty-five dollars, and not a cent less. So come down with the amount, right here and now."

"I can't pay you to-night. I haven't got the money. You know I don't owe you a cent; but, sooner than be arrested and go to law about it, I will pay you if you will wait till to-morrow morning. I shall get paid then for a lot of turkeys I have brought down to market. Or, if you will go with me down to the Bull's Head, I will borrow the money there and pay you."

"Boots cost too much to wear them out running after an honest debt like this," said the man, with a contemptuous leer, as he turned on his heel. "I'll call the constable. A night in the station-house will give you a chance to count up how much those turkeys will come to."

"Stop!" said Volney, speaking now for the first time and laying his hand upon the man's arm. "You can have your money now. I will lend my friend the amount."

Despite the protest of the farmer, Volney drew forth his pocket-book, and counting out the sum placed it in the farmer's hand, saying,

"It's every cent I've got, but you are welcome to it. You can pay me back when we get to the hotel. I can wait that long for it, even if this man can't."

Wiping his eyes upon his sleeve, the farmer thanked his young friend in a broken voice, and paid over the money, receiving his bill in exchange from the man, who thereupon left them, muttering that he had as kind a heart as anybody, but that was no reason people shouldn't pay him what they owed him.

The man had just disappeared around the corner of the building when the farmer, holding up the bill, cried, with a glance of dismay as he looked at it in the feeble glare of the gaslight above them,

"The scoundrel has not receipted this bill! Wait a minute and watch my valise," quickly turning to Volney and throwing the valise at his feet. "I'll soon catch him. I'll let him know I am not so green as I look."

He darted in the direction the man had gone, leaving Volney so excited in the result of the chase that he could hardly restrain himself from joining in it. As it was, he caught up the valise and ran to the corner just in time to

see his friend disappear at full speed down a narrow street, where he was soon lost in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXII.

A GLIMPSE AT CITY LIFE.

VERY impatiently indeed did Volney Slade stand in the darkened corner of the dépôt wall straining his eyes through the gloom for the returning form of his friend, and listening intently to hear the sound of his coming footsteps. Moment after moment passed, and there was neither sight nor sound of his return. As he waited the street seemed to him to grow darker and more quiet. He now began to fear that his friend might have caught up with the man only to be felled to the ground by a quick blow from an assassin.

Alarmed by this apprehension, he could remain where he was no longer. He started in search of the farmer, regretting half audibly that he had not accompanied him on his errand, which had evidently turned out so disastrously. As he started on a run down the street to retrieve, if possible, his neglect ere it was too late, the form of a man suddenly confronted him, and a quick, firm grasp seized his arm. One glance told Volney that he was in the hands of a policeman, whose eyes had a twinkle in them as malicious as that of the badge that glistened on his breast as he said,

“Not so fast, my boy—not so fast! Trying to make way with a valise, are you? Thought you’d dodge Sandy Grill round a dark corner, did you? But you didn’t know as Sandy Grill has got his bat-eyes on to-night, and was watching you standing here for a chance to slope. So come along, my pretty bird! There’s a cage as is waiting for you.”

The young man’s first impulse of innocence and surprise was to shake off the man’s hold, but it only grew tighter, and a baton suddenly flourished before his eyes as Sandy Grill said,

"Now look here, my cove: you don't want me to play a lively tattoo on your skull, do you?"

"But, sir," expostulated Volney, ceasing his efforts to release himself, "why do you seize me in this way? What have I done? I am no thief. I know this valise is not mine. I am taking care of it for the owner, and was going in search of him when you stopped me."

"Oh yes, I've heard that story afore! It's first rate, I know; but then, you see, it's no go with me. So come along!"

Tightening his hold, he pulled his half-resisting prisoner around the corner of the dépôt into the full light of the lamps that hung from the high-vaulted porch.

"Will you listen one moment to me?" pleaded Volney in a tone so earnest and with a face so honest that the other paused in spite of himself; "I am sure you will believe me when I tell you my story."

"Well, tell your story. Cut it short, and take care you don't eriminate yourself. What you say to me is evidence agin you in court."

He shook his skeptical face with a warning gesture. The young man narrated his experience in so straightforward a manner that the policeman's countenance gradually relaxed as he listened; and when he heard of the farmer and the bill and the money, he clapped his hands upon his knees and broke out into a roar of laughter, which was as inexplicable to Volney as was his former conduct.

"Fresh from the country! Taken in and done for!" he at last managed to ejaculate between his peals of laughter, wiping the tears from his face and looking down on his companion with a mingled expression of curiosity and pity.

"I don't understand you," said the young man, his face perplexed and astonished by turns.

"Of course not!" laughed the other, holding on to his fat sides; "but when you see that forty-five dollars you will be older than I am, and twice as gray. Why, boy, can't you see through it yet? You've been robbed, beat out of your money, swindled, bamboozled, laid out colder than last winter's ice! I am sorry for you; but the more

you learn now, the less you've got to learn when you get older."

"You don't mean to say," gasped Volney, his face growing pale and his voice unsteady, "that the farmer was a cheat—that he has deceived and robbed me? It cannot be! Why, here is his valise, which he has left with me."

"Of course, and nothing in it," said the policeman, taking hold of it and weighing and turning it with a critical eye. "That's part of the game. I'll bet a month's pay there's nothing but kindling-wood and paper in that valise."

So saying, he took a bunch of keys from his pocket, and opening the valise held it upside down. Out from it fell at the feet of the astonished young man several sticks of wood and half a dozen newspapers rolled up in a bunch. For several moments Volney stood white, trembling and speechless. Then, looking up into his companion's face with an expression of woe that made Sandy Grill's heart soften toward him, he said, with a quivering voice,

"It was every dollar I had—yes, every cent! What am I to do? Where shall I go? I am a stranger here: I don't know a soul in all this great city."

"Now, you don't tell me you was green enough to give that fellow every cent you had, do you?" asked the policeman, his expression of sympathy taking on for the moment a touch of contempt. "You look as if you ought to have more sense. They don't carry their eggs all in one basket up your way, do they?"

"It was every bit of money I had," replied the other with a sad shake of his head as he took out his wallet and looked through it in vain for any piece of money, however small. "You are right, sir, in blaming me. What a fool I was not to have suspected him! But he looked so honest and gave me such good advice that I couldn't help believing in him."

"Gave you good advice, eh?" and Sandy Grill's broad face broke out into a smile of comical derision. "So does the devil give good advice when he knows he's got a fellow sure. Well, there's no use of making you feel any

worse about it. Your money's gone, dead sure, but you've got your spunk left, I hope. But this is a bad go. No money and no friends! What are you going to do? It's easy enough to go without your supper, but you can't walk the streets all night, and it's too cold to sleep out on the soft side of a plank or the feather end of a cellar-door."

"Oh, if you could only help me in some way!" said Volney, imploringly, turning his deeply-troubled face full upon the other. "Is there, then, no place where I could go and get trusted for a night's lodging? See!" pulling out a small silver watch; "I could give this as security."

"Put up your watch and come along with me," said the policeman, a trifle kindly, after closely eying his companion. "Got any baggage with you?"

"Yes, a valise. Here is the check," producing it.

"Good thing you didn't lose that, and your watch too. It shows you've some luck left, though I wouldn't advise you to play policy on it. Well, come along," picking up the farmer's bag and putting back into it the wood and paper. "Let's get your baggage and go over to the station-house. If we can't do any better, you can bunk there to-night. But the first thing you must do is to write home this very night for money. You can't get along without money, that's certain; might as well try to raise crops in fields of stone. Yes, money's your best friend. Without it you'll have no friends; with it, more friends than you'll want."

So saying, he led the way to the baggage-room, where Volney joyfully caught sight of his valise, and took it in his hand with a tightened grasp, as if it too might disappear from his hold in some mysterious way.

"Now, if you had only held on to your money as tight as that," said Sandy Grill, noticing, as they walked along the street, how closely the young man was carrying the valise in front of him, "your money would have been safe enough. But I guess the folks up your way lock the door after the horse is stolen?"

"Make fun of me as much as you choose; I deserve all you can say. I never would have believed that I could

be so easily deceived. It will be a good lesson to me, but it's a very hard one to bear just now. The thought of being without a penny in a great city like this fills me with a dread and loneliness you can little imagine."

"I don't see what you left the farm and came to the city for, any way," said Grill with an impatient fling of his hand. "You said a while ago that you were going to learn to be a machinist. Better have stuck to your farm. A farmer's life is a happy one; and well paid, too, with eggs fifty cents a dozen and butter so high a poor man can only smell it. There are too many machinists here now. Wages are down to starvation-point; half the foundries and shops are closed, and Heaven only knows when the times will be good enough for them to open again. Take my advice, and get home as fast as you can. If you can learn how to raise cheap potatoes, butter and eggs, you'll do more good in your lifetime than if you were to be the best machinist living. Besides, if you do get work here, you will only be crowding out some poor devil who wants it more than you do. But you don't look to me to be a fellow as would take the food out of other men's mouths who've got wives and children to feed."

"You are right," said Volney, eagerly catching at this last compliment. "I would never take any man's place from him, much less the food from his family. I would starve before I would do it. I came to the city to get no one's situation. The place I am after is not filled yet. There is nothing wrong or selfish in my trying to make a living, is there?"

"Where is the situation?" was the gruff query; for Sandy Grill had worked himself into an ill-humor over this last invasion of the city workingman's territory. "It can't be worth much, to be standing open these hard times, when skilled mechanics are working for a dollar a day."

"It's with a Mr. William Marsh, of Manayunk," replied Volney, hesitatingly. "He advertises for a young man to learn the care of machinery in his cotton-mill."

"Oh, does he? The old fraud!" was the malicious rejoinder as the policeman threw his head back with a jerk. "It's a wonder he didn't advertise for a girl to run his old machinery at two dollars a week."

"Do you know him?"

"I should say I did know him, the old cast-iron soul!" was the emphatic response. "My brother-in-law has worked for him these last three years. He says a meaner white man you couldn't find, unless you got one made to order out of a hog's body with a miser's soul in it. Reddie Stitt knows what he is talking about. He's got a head on him as level and true as the best piece of shafting running."

"I am sorry to hear that Mr. Marsh is a mean man," said Volney after a pause, during which the policeman had strided on a pace or two in advance, muttering and shaking his head with angry gestures. "Perhaps it's the hard times you talk about that make him close."

"Close?" almost roared Sandy Grill, wheeling around and looking down on Volney with his eyes aflame. "Is that all you call it when a man treats his hands like brutes, and cuts down their wages till they can't get decent food for their mouths or a dry roof over their heads? You'd better pawn that watch and buy a dictionary, and learn what words mean. Up your way, I take it, they must call turnips and water a good square meal for a laboring-man, and a haystack a nice warm bed on a rainy night."

"Excuse me, sir, if I have offended you; I certainly did not mean to do so," replied the young man, endeavoring to appease the other's anger. "I am sure you know more about these things than I do, and I am thankful to you for telling me of them."

"Are you? Then I will tell you more," a perceptible sneer lingering in his voice. "If you are a friend to the workingman, just you keep away from old Marsh's factory. There's been a strike up there against his starvation wages, and he's trying now to get men who will work for almost nothing. But the boys have got him tight if men like you will only stay away and let them fight it out with him. Hang him! If he can't get new hands, he's got to keep the old ones. That's what Reddie Stitt says, and he's boss machinist up there and knows just how things stands. And let me tell you something more," lowering his voice to a whisper that had as much of a threat in it as the words he spoke: "if you do go there, you'll be

under Reddie, and won't he make it hot for you! Yes, indeed! He'll make you dance around worse than a horse with a nest of bumblebees between his legs. Reddie Stitt knows how to take care of his rights. If you want him to show you how to take care of machinery, he'll do it so fast that you'll wish, before the first day's over, that you was digging a hundred bushels of potatoes a day for a living;" and Sandy Grill chuckled and laughed, and his head rolled from side to side with a very knowing air.

By this time they had come in front of a small brick building, from the large window of which streamed a glare of light. Looking in, Volney saw a room in which an excited crowd of men and women, with here and there a policeman, crowded around a raised desk, behind which sat a man who was vigorously shaking his hand in token of silence.

"Hearing a case. Street-fight, I guess. Somebody's hair gone and eyes in mourning," said Grill, opening the door and beckoning his companion to follow. "This way," leading him past the crowd into a small side room. "You stay here while I report your case to the lieutenant. After a while he will see what can be done for you."

So saying, he pushed a chair toward the young man and went out, closing the door.

Left alone, Volney Slade found his thoughts wholly occupied for the moment by the peculiar strangeness of his situation, so contrary to all the buoyant hopes with which he had left his home. Here he was in a station-house—a place his mind had always associated with crimes and criminals of the worst sort; and now came the thought of his utter helplessness, for cool reflection had so deserted him that he was a prey to every fear. In a station-house, without money and without friends! Perhaps a lodger to-night under the same roof that covered thieves, assassins and drunkards! The very air seemed laden with crime, and grew stifling and oppressive. He looked about him in dismay, the perspiration trickling from every pore. A deathly sickness came slowly over him. He dropped his valise upon the floor and sank into a chair, pressing his cold hands upon his throbbing head.

As if to make the reality of his position all the more terrible to his distorted and morbid fancy, which had fully gotten the better of him, the uproar in the adjoining room increased. Scuffling and oaths and the angry voices of men mingled with the shrieks of women filled his ears with terror and made his heart quake with a fear he could not control. He would have leaped through the window and ran he knew not where, so that he could shut out these awful sounds, but he was so weak he could not rise, and fell back in his chair trembling in every limb. Fortunately, the tumult began to subside. His courage revived a little. He listened, and heard the voices grow more stifled, the shrieks fainter and fainter, and the scuffling less distinct, as if the prisoners were being taken to some distant part of the building. And now the air was freighted with less disturbing sounds. The subdued talking and the muffled tread of the crowd in the next room told him, with a sigh of relief, that it was evidently dispersing.

More composed now, he turned his thoughts upon himself. Of what avail were they to soothe the mortification of his present position? For that was the feeling which took possession of him and magnified with wonderful power the failures of the day—his quarrel with Emily, the loss of his money, the tauntings of the policeman and his unfavorable description of Mr. Marsh, and the prospect of sleeping in this station-house like the commonest refugee of want. These all crowded upon his sensitive spirit, until, no longer able to command himself, he bowed his head upon his hands and sought relief in tears. A soothing balm to his wounded heart were these tears, slowly calming his excited feelings. And as the dew woos the drooping flowers to life again, so did these tears, by some mysterious law, lift up his fainting hopes and send a gentle glow of peace through all his soul. With a little hysterical laugh, as if he were reproaching himself for being thus unmanned, he quickly raised his head. Thrusting his hand in his pocket, he took out his handkerchief to speedily wipe away all traces of his weeping before the return of the policeman.

As he pulled out the handkerchief an envelope fell

from its folds at his feet. With a murmured exclamation of wonder he picked it up, and found to his surprise that it was directed to himself. He opened it. As he did so a roll of bills dropped into his hand. For an instant he sat bewildered. Then, as he recognized the handwriting, he clutched the money with a little cry of joy, hastened across the room and read, with a voice that trembled and whispered by turns, the following letter :

“DEAR VOLNEY : Do not be angry with me for doing this. I wanted to give you something to remember me by. I have been saving this money for you. I knew you would not take it if I gave it to you with my own hands, so I put it in this letter, which I intend to slip in your pocket when you say good-bye to me this morning. Please do not refuse to take it for my sake. It will make me so happy to know it is helping you. I must write you what I could not say to you, for fear I should cry and spoil it all. Volney, your nurse loves you so much. This money is only a feeble offering of her affection. Do let me love you now, Volney, just the same as when you were a little boy. I do hope you will succeed in the city. I know you will, for you are so good and noble and true. I shall pray night and morning and all the day for God to protect and befriend you and keep you from all harm. Good-bye, and success to you is the warm wish of your loving nurse,
“AZIEL LOYD.”

“Dear, good, kind Aziel!” was all the young man could say, for the tears were falling fast upon the letter as he pressed it to his lips, his heart swelling with fervent gratitude, his eyes glistening with unspeakable joy.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FURTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF WILLIAM DIBBS.

BILL DIBBS was alone this morning in the bar-room of the Green Tree Inn. He stood behind the counter, and, with both arms leaning upon it, was writing a letter, while Spike eyed him suspiciously from his cage above. Dibbs' appearance was a comical one, and seemed to afford much amusement to himself. He stopped his writing several times, and turning around surveyed himself in the glass with a laugh. But the laugh after all was a sickly one—a dry, emotionless laugh. It showed

that, notwithstanding this show of humor, he did not consider himself a legitimate object of merriment. The fact was, Dibbs was now paying in a bloodshot and black eye the penalty of his adventure the night before with Patrick Doyle. Although he had slept with a piece of raw beef bound over his eye all night—a cure he had read of in a sporting paper—it was as black and blue and red this morning as the aforesaid Doyle could have wished to see it.

“What’s the odds, so long as your happy?” he said, winking with his uninjured eye at his distorted image in the broken mirror and turning again to his writing. “I am not the first fellow who has run against a post or a door or had the street fly up and hit him in the face. Accidents will happen despite the greatest care. But to think that gentle female, Mrs. Boozer, should accuse me of having been in a fight! Me! Bill Dibbs! With a disposition so mild and inoffensive that if a man were to kick me I would take off my hat and apologize to him for my want of appreciation! Ah, Mrs. Boozer! a noble soul cares not for the calumnies of enemies, but it’s hard indeed to be misjudged by one’s friends. Yet I forgive you. Yes, partner of that bosom which now reclines vacant and at peaceful rest in yonder cemetery, I harbor no resentment for your unkind accusation. Being a woman, Mrs. Boozer, you could not help it. The female heart is always suspicious, tender though it be, lovely woman—tender though it be!”

Having thus relieved himself, his melancholy face resumed again the keen, cunning smile with which he had been writing his letter, and which he now finished, signing his name with a flourish that he held out at arm’s length to admire, clapping his hand over his black eye to shield it from the bright light of the room, which was becoming exceedingly painful to it.

“Now, that’s what I call a signature that has character in it! None of your small, screwed-up letters, as if a fellow were ashamed of his name, but a bold, dashing hand—a regular John-Hancock flourish. Now for punctuation and spelling,” he continued, going critically over his production. “Mistakes in letters are

like mistakes in a man's accounts—no excuse for them.” If one could have looked unobserved over Dibbs' shoulder while he was thus engaged in admiring his epistle, he might have read this important letter, which had cost the writer an hour's literary effort and many references to his dictionary and *Thesaurus*. It had been written in answer to one he had recently received, marked, in red ink, “Very confidential,” and proposing the sale of counterfeit money. His reply was as follows :

“SLOWVILLE, Penna., November 17, 1877.

“MESSRS. GUNBRIDGE & Co., New York City, Gentlemen: I beg to acknowledge the very favorable reception of your highly-important letter. I assure you the weighty considerations you advance for my compliance with your suggestions have influenced me in an affirmative manner. Your very complimentary opinion of my executive ability in the transaction which you propose to submit to my fiduciary care I hope will be more than substantiated by subsequent communications between my humble self and the progressive establishment of which your epistolary document is a brilliant reflex.

“Even to one of my inexperienced powers of ratiocination, the proposition you advance, of the desirability of a cheaper circulating medium than that which the paternal government of the United States so grudgingly distributes among its citizens, meets my warmest approval and excites my highest admiration of your financial genius.

“You will please expedite by express to the cognomen and subjoined address the sum of one hundred dollars of your approved currency in diminutive bills suited to the exigences of a pastoral life. I will use ardent exertions to distribute your consignment among the verdant population of this community; and in case of complete success—of which I am most sanguine—I will remit you fifty per cent. of the profit, and await your further consignments.

“Of my immutable secrecy you have the pledge of our mutual interests—more powerful, you will acknowledge, than any paltry consideration of safety, or the base fear of detection.

“I remain, dear sirs, your obedient servant,

“WILLIAM DIBBS,

“Care of Green Tree Inn, Slowville, Penna.

“P. S.—If you have a one-hundred-dollar bill of plausible appearance, you might forward the same. I opine I could deftly manipulate it into the possession of some rural individual. W. D.

“P. S.—Secondly. Allow me to add that it would be a waste of your valuable time to forward me any package containing sawdust and marked C. O. D. For while sawdust is valuable for stuffing dolls, filling spittoons and covering slippery sidewalks, your humble servant is not desirous of entering either into the purchase or possession of such a commodity. *Verb. sap.*; which, being literally translated, means, Don't fish for a whale with a pin-hook. W. D.”

“And now,” said Dibbs, after he had sealed and directed this letter, taking from his pocket a clean white handker-

chief, which he rolled into a long strip and began to tie over his eye, "I shall put this damaged optic into seclusion for the rest of the day. It is in mourning, and therefore ought to retire from the public gaze. Besides, it is no more than charitable that I should thus relieve any curious and anxious sorrow the people of Slowville might have in regard to my recent accident."

With his eye thus covered and his hat pulled far down on that side, he ran across the street to the post-office. He deposited his letter in the mail, which was just leaving, and came back to the bar-room to find Rader Craft impatiently awaiting him.

"Why, Dibbs, my dear young friend, good-morning!" he said, seizing him cordially by the hand. "You cannot tell how anxious I am to see you. I sat up last night till after midnight, waiting to hear from you according to promise. Why," for the first time seeing the bandage as Dibbs jerked off his hat and deftly threw it upon its peg behind the bar, "what's the matter? Have you been injured?"

"Injured!" replied Dibbs in a hollow voice as he slowly raised the bandage to his forehead, and then stood with folded arms, looking with a grave face at the lawyer. "Thou hast spoken well, disciple of Blackstone! It is indeed injured. I might add bruised, wounded, mutilated, stained, soiled, tarnished, dilapidated, devastated—yea, verily, desolated."

"How did it happen? I hope your adventure last night involved you in no serious trouble?" said the lawyer with his bland, conciliatory smile; "I should be sincerely grieved if it did—on my account."

"Mr. Craft"—and the seriousness of Dibbs' manner increased—"how much do you consider the commercial value of a damaged eye? For what consideration would you be willing to accept a visual orb so highly decorated as this?"

"I certainly should object to it on any terms of my own choosing. Why do you ask?"

"Because, before proceeding to the narration of last night's events, I wish not only to settle the claim of damages which I have against you in this case, but

to have them paid promptly, cheerfully and without cavil."

"I will gladly render any compensation in my power, if I am to blame for this calamity. But how am I to judge of my liability unless I am told the circumstances of the case?"

"This eye," replied Dibbs with deliberation, slowly pointing at the damaged member, "was maltreated thus in your service. Its discoloration indicates only too vividly how it came in unfriendly contact with the heavy bunch of fives in possession of that Hibernian, Patrick Doyle, who appeared to me unannounced while I was last night making my tour of investigation in your behalf around Silas Gagger's farm-house. Yes, sir, the adamantine fist of Patrick Doyle was thrust against my innocent head with a force that disclosed to me for an instant all the starry orbs of heaven. It was a blow, sir, that opened up to my vision indefinite space. No astronomer ever saw so many stars at once, and they were as brilliant as they were innumerable."

"Then you did not get into the house?—were driven away, I suppose, before you had any chance to see what was going on?" and the smile on the lawyer's face gave way to disappointment. "I was afraid you were undertaking more than you could do—"

"Were you, indeed?" interrupted Dibbs in a bantering tone as he pulled down the bandage and went behind the bar. "Then I suppose you will not be at all disappointed if you should hear no more of my story? So be it, then. I will take a black eye for my portion of last night's work, and you can have your ignorance of it to keep company with your fear of my abilities to perform what I undertook."

Then, with a satisfied shake of his head, Dibbs turned his back upon his companion and began to wipe off the bottles and shelves, and otherwise put the bar in order for the day.

"Nothing like cleanliness to give zest to thirst or hunger," he soliloquized, breathing upon the gilt labels and giving them a brighter polish.

"Dibbs, my dear boy, I hope I have not offended

you?" said the lawyer, leaning across the counter and touching him upon the shoulder. "You did not understand me. I meant that I was anxious about your success, not fearful of your failure. Don't you see the difference?"

"Oh yes—a difference without a distinction;" and Dibbs, without turning around, went on vigorously polishing the bottles. "I am sorry, though, I cannot give you back that important letter you committed to my care," looking askance over his shoulder with an expression half serious and half comic.

"I hope you did not lose that?" said the lawyer, his face more dubious still, for Dibbs' manner was perplexing him not a little.

"That letter was placed where it will do the most good, or I am no judge of the female face divine," carelessly replied Dibbs, examining his stock of sugar and lemons and proceeding to put fresh water into the kettle that stood over the spirit-lamp.

The lawyer's countenance lighted up with an eager smile, which he tried to conceal by rubbing his hands over his face as Dibbs suddenly looked up at him. He saw by Dibbs' expression that he was concealing some important information, but just how to get at it without diverting Dibbs' suspicions to himself Craft was at a loss. Dibbs fortunately came to his relief. Planting himself firmly behind the counter, that individual leaned his elbows upon it, and gazing steadily into the lawyer's face said, as he shook his finger slowly and with a knowing gesture which was reflected in the twinkle of his eyes,

"Mr. Craft, I have much to tell you about the reception of that letter by the object of our mutual admiration, Miss Aziel Loyd. Oh what an expressive face she has! Every feature of it speaks with the voice of an angel! But first you must pay me damages for this eye, or these lips, like those of the Sphynx of the desert, shall remain for ever sealed."

"How much do you want for your damaged eye?" asked the lawyer, quickly taking out his pocket-book and with difficulty restraining his impatience.

"Twenty-five dollars. That will be five for each

color—black, green, blue, red and yellow. A very cheap painting, executed in body-colors by our Milesian artist."

"There's your money, but it seems to me a very exorbitant sum for you to ask;" and Craft handed it to him with a grudging expression.

"The prices of eyes differ according to quality," laughed the other, stowing the money away in his pocket. "Glass eyes are cheap, blind eyes worthless, but the eyes of William Dibbs have just now a market value not readily estimated. Besides, Mr. Craft, with this twenty-five dollars you are paying me for both the direct and consequential damages to this eye. In other words, this eye is not only painful and hideous, but it has cost me my discharge. Mrs. Boozer, on seeing this mournful orb this morning, notified me, in the strong and unmistakable language for which that lady is well known in this community, that after to-day she would clear me out of the place—that she did not want any ruffian about her."

"I am sorry this has happened; but you just keep quiet and attend to your work. I will see Mrs. Boozer and get her to retract her sentence of discharge."

"No, sir, I thank you. The fiat has gone forth: let it so remain. William Dibbs is able to take care of himself. To-night Mrs. Boozer and I sever our commercial relations; and ere many days your humble servant will be testing the ability of the world to give him an independent living. But to return to a topic more interesting to you. You wish to hear about that letter?"

"Yes; for it very seriously affects the cause of a client of mine. You say you gave it to her? Saw her read it? Noticed her manner in every particular?" and as Dibbs nodded emphatic assent to these questions, "What conclusions did you draw from her conduct?"

"That she is in love—deeper than Venus when she sinks beneath the cerulean waves," answered Dibbs in a confidential whisper.

"In love? What made you think that?" Craft tried to force to his face an incredulous smile, though his great heart began to swell with a smothered joy.

"When a woman reads a letter over three times, and"

blushes red as a rose and turns pale as a lily, and sighs and trembles, I should say that something in the letter had touched her heart—deeply though tenderly touched it.”

“Did she do all that?”

“Yes, indeed ; it made a shiver of jealousy run all over me to see her sweet agitation. Ah ! I would give worlds—yes, fifty black eyes if I could have them—to be able to touch the female heart like that.”

“What did she say ? I declare, my client will be overjoyed at this unexpected result. It was only a matter of business, after all, but your account proves the surety of accomplishment.”

The lawyer rubbed his hands and began to stride up and down the room, his bland smile as genial as the broad band of sunshine that streamed through the window upon the floor.

“She said to tell you she had received the letter and would answer it,” said Dibbs, giving a sly wink at Spike.

“A very excellent message—shows a womanly reserve so admirable in the sex,” said the lawyer to himself, complacently adjusting his tie and surveying his form with a look of proud satisfaction. Then, suddenly glancing out of the window, he added to Dibbs, “Ah ! I must be going ! Yonder is a client with whom I have an appointment. I will talk with you, friend Dibbs, further about this before the day is over. But you take my advice and don’t irritate Mrs. Boozer. She will by night retract what she said. Besides, we cannot get along in Slowville without you.”

With cautious and reassuring nods of his head, he shook the young man’s hand and left the room. As he walked toward his office he exclaimed in a low voice, “I knew it—I knew it ! Her loving heart told her the letter spoke only of me. Cupid’s dart hath left its festering wound. The lawyer and his client are not unwelcome to her. Yes, she smiles on me ! Her heart is mine ! Oh, blessed, waiting heart ! This very night I will press thee to my bosom !”

Dibbs all this while was leaning on the counter, the

tears of laughter running down his face, as he said to the bird, "Spike my boy, I've fixed the lawyer's case for him. He'll go and propose to her to-day. I could see the rash purpose kindling in his eye. He'll try to court her now, Spike, with the silvery words of his honeyed mouth. But—ha, ha!—Spike, court her as he will, he'll find it only a court of errors, after all."

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT TWO LETTERS WERE ABOUT.

KIND words and kind acts! How potent their influence!—far greater than all law and authority, the fear of punishment or the contempt of correction, the coldness of ingratitude or the stubbornness of hatred. No human mind can comprehend the mysterious alchemy by which they work upon the soul, stirring the depths of its better nature, and awakening into new life affection long since dead or love that has buried itself, wrapped in the shroud of human neglect. Like the soft sunlight and the gentle dew, kind words and kind acts go upon their heavenly mission, penetrating the dark spots where human nature languishes for the warmth of sympathy or the friendly touch of love. And as the sun calls the desert to blossom again, and the dew gently raises each shrinking flower, so responds the heart of man to the tender voice of sympathy and the tremulous words of love. Poor Aziel Loyd! She had written her letter and put the money in it with many misgivings. She knew how proud Volney was, how independent of spirit, how confident in his own unaided abilities; and what made her more doubtful whether he would keep the money was her knowledge of how he had grown more and more reserved and dignified toward her these past few years, asserting rather by his manner than by his words his social superiority. It was as if he had said to her, "I have outgrown your love and care. You have ceased to be my nurse; I am a man now. You will oblige me by putting aside your

old ways of talking to and treating me. Hereafter I wish you to pay me that respect which is due to our new relations of servant and master." It had been a very hard struggle with Aziel to do as he had bidden her. To curb the expression of her love; to restrain the motherly air which his presence always inspired; to hide the look of tender admiration in her eyes when she spoke to him; to try and forget that her care and love were no longer essential to his happiness, and that henceforth she was to be to him no more than any servant his mother could hire,—these, each and all, had brought many a pang to her heart, many a secret tear, many a wakeful hour. And yet her love for him, which no indifference or neglect could diminish, had helped her in this unequal conflict between her affections and the exhibition of them. Thus it had come to pass that, although she bore herself toward him in all respects as he had wished, her love for him grew stronger and stronger, like a flower blooming with luxuriant fragrance in the dark and silent recess of a rock. Ah! rarest, sweetest flower of all the earth is woman's love, for it will grow with lasting life in barren soil, where charity itself can find no trace of nurture. But if Aziel could have looked into the station-house this evening and seen the welcome of tears her letter had received—could she have beheld "her boy," as her heart ever spoke of him, pressing her letter to his lips, could she have heard with what affection he spoke her name, and how he upbraided himself for the repelling way in which he had treated her, and could she have caught the words of his firm resolve that henceforth he would never by word or act repress any demonstration of her affection for him,—she would have cried with joy, even as he did now as he looked down upon the roll of money in his hand, and knew how surely it had rescued him in his hour of greatest need.

Fifty-four dollars! He counted it slowly over with his trembling fingers. Small bills every one of them, just as she had treasured them up week after week for his use, while he had been putting her away from him with haughty indifference. His heart smote him, and the money seemed to burn its rebuke into his very hand.

Yet stronger grew his gratitude and firmer his resolution of reparation.

"Well, my friend," said Sandy Grill's gruff voice as he opened the door and stood on the threshold, "I've told your story to the lieutenant. He says you can bunk here for the night. That's the best we can do for you, though I don't mind going a quarter on your supper. So come along; we'll take a plate of oysters together."

"I am much obliged to you," said Volney, excitedly, beckoning to him and holding out in his open hand the roll of bills; "but I have got money myself now. See! I found this in my pocket."

"Found it in your pocket?" slowly exclaimed the policeman as he came forward and looked down at the money, and then fastened an incredulous gaze on his companion. "See here! what kind of a game do you call this? Robbed of every cent you had a little while ago, and now with your fist full of greenbacks. This must be a country game of bluff—"

"Read this letter," interrupted the other. "The money I found in it, put there by my old nurse. She certainly hid the letter in my pocket as I bid her good-bye this morning, but I never found it till a few moments ago."

Sandy Grill read the letter, stopping now and then for an ejaculatory "Humph!" and a scrutinizing glance at his companion. When he had finished reading, he turned the epistle thoughtfully over, as if he were either debating its genuineness or trying to comprehend the circumstances under which it had been written. At last, examining the money in the young man's hand with a curious and doubtful look, he seemed convinced that no deception was being practiced upon him. He handed back the letter, saying,

"Well, I don't go much on nurses as a class—the best of 'em are poor shifts for mothers—but this nurse of yours couldn't have done more if she were your mother. You ought to think a heap of her. I tell you, when people will give you money, they have got a feeling for you that's worth having. But it was just like a woman to go and stick it that way in your pocket, where you might have lost it a dozen times to-day. Women are always putting

money away in old stockings, stove-pipes and tin cans, and out-of-the-way pockets, where a man would never think of looking for it; and the first thing they know it's burnt up, thrown away or lost."

"But it was very lucky for me she put the money where she did. If it had been in my pocket-book, it would have gone with the other."

"So it would," laughed Sandy Grill. "In that case you would have loaned your turkey-friend a hundred dollars instead of forty-five. Well, I am glad you have got out of your scrape so easily. Now I must go back to my beat; so, if you will come along with me, I'll show you a decent lodging-house where you can stay to-night. Only keep your money out of sight and have nothing to say to any body. A stranger can get along all right in this city if he keeps his hands out of his pockets and his mouth shut. Keep your own counsel; never show your money nor tell your business among strangers."

With this parting advice he motioned him to take up his valise, and they left the station-house in quest of the inn, which was near by. Here Sandy Grill introduced his companion to the proprietor, and having seen the young man's name registered and a good room assigned him, bade him good-night and wished him good luck.

"I cannot thank you enough, sir, for your kindness to me," said Volney as they parted at the outer door. "I shall always remember you with gratitude; and if ever I can repay you, I certainly shall with all my heart."

"You can show your gratitude, as I said before," replied the policeman in a low and determined voice, "by keeping away from that mill. Give the boys and girls a chance for their living. That's all the pay I ask. You've got money and a good home, and they haven't." He walked away, muttering something about bread being taken out of people's mouths by those who have got plenty in their own.

Volney Slade, not at all shaken by the policeman's words in his determination to apply for the situation at Marsh's mill, quickly despatched his supper, for which his excited mind gave little appetite. Then he sought his room, where he busied himself writing two letters. These

letters, written in the following order, were afterward inclosed in one envelope and sent by a trusty messenger of the landlord to the post-office in time to catch the midnight mail, which would bring them to their destination the following morning. The first letter ran thus :

“ PHILA., Nov. 16, 1877.

“ MY DEAR EMILY : This is the first letter I have ever written you. I write it with a sad but loving heart, for I ask you to forgive me, knowing how much I need your forgiveness and feeling how little I deserve it, and yet so conscious that I can never be happy again without it.

“ Oh, if I could only blot out the memory of this morning, how happy should I be ! What evil spirit possessed me to speak so unkindly to you, to treat you so cruelly ? And when I loved you so much !—so much, indeed, that now I pen these words with the bitter tears of remorse, that you may the better know how much I loved you then, how much I love you now !

“ I beseech you to forgive me. As it was my first, so shall it be my last, offense. I was not myself. I did not know what I was saying. My lips belied my heart ; my conduct bore false witness of my soul. I look back upon it all as a dreadful dream, in which, controlled by some wicked spirit, I spoke and acted so totally contrary to all my feelings toward you. Believe me when I assure you that my faith in you is only equaled by my love. And this faith in you tells me not only that you will be true to me though all the earth should fail, but my love comes now with the affirming hope that you will also pardon me as fully and forgive me as truly as you love me.

“ For do you not love me still ? I ask the question, knowing only too well the strength of your love, which has dared so much for selfish me. I feel how unworthy I am of so good and true a heart as yours. But if you will only forgive and forget, I will ever strive to show you that my heart can love you faithfully and find its greatest joy in making your happiness the object of my life.

“ Here, alone, surrounded by strangers, with thousands of strange hearts beating around me, I turn my thoughts to you with a grateful sense of rest. With your dear image in my soul, I can never be utterly lonely, though I miss your sweet voice and the loving touch of your caress. And sad though I be at what I have done to you, there steals over me now the memory of our happy hours, which echoes in my soul the promise of joys to come, when, knowing me better, you shall love me more, and I shall ever be your devoted worshiper.

“ Good-night ! I say it with a kiss and sigh of love, which may some good angel bear to your dear pillow ere the night has passed, with a happy, loving dream of me, so unworthy, yet so devoted.

“ Yours, humbly and ever faithfully,

“ VOLNEY.”

The second letter, in which he inclosed the first, was this :

“ DEAR AZIEL : How can I sufficiently thank you for your kind remembrance of me, which this night came forth from its hiding-place to

greet me? I do not deserve such a token of affection at your hands. I confess this with shame as I remember the many times I have hurt your feelings by repelling your attentions to my comfort and happiness, and the exhibitions of your affection for me. It was mean—yes, very ungrateful—in me to treat you so, and I hope you will forgive me for it.

“You were a dear, good nurse to me in those years when I remember no care but yours. You entered into every childish joy and sorrow of mine; and as I grew older, how well I know you were ever my playmate, my champion, and my sole refuge in all times of trouble!

“A second mother you were to me, Aziel, and—I confess it now—you were for many years more to me than my own mother. I loved you more, I confided in you more. I can never understand it, but you seemed dearer and nearer to me than she. I loved you freely; toward her I always felt a restraint which even now I cannot overcome.

“How wrong and ungrateful it was in me to try to put aside, as some useless thing of the past, the affection I had for you, and still have now! I thought it was manly to outgrow it, and the sooner to do so, I made you cease your old ways toward me. But let youth’s folly and failure be forgotten together. I will never again steel my manner against you. I will always show you the love I feel for you, and you shall do and say to me whatever your loving heart prompts.

“Dear old nurse! As I gratefully accept your gift to-night with all my old affection for you coming again into a new and stronger life, so you must forgive me all the slights of these later years, and believe me now, as ever,

Your own boy,
VOLNEY.”

“P. S.—Inclosed you will find a letter to Emily Grundle. Will you keep it a secret from mother, and see it safely in Emily’s own hands as soon as you can? If so, my old nurse shall make me far happier than she can imagine.
V.”

CHAPTER XXV.

SCENE IN THE LITTLE BACK OFFICE.

AS Sandy Grill had said, there was trouble at Marsh’s mill. Labor and Capital, goaded by the hard times, were having a quarrel. Only half of the factory was moving, the weaving department being idle. The weavers had struck against a proposed reduction of wages; and as thus far they had, by threats and bribes, effectually prevented others from taking their places, they were waiting with the patient confidence of victory for their employer to accede to their terms. William Marsh did not look like a man to accede to anybody’s terms save his own; and this morning, as he sat in his little back office, out of which he glared upon half a dozen badly-paid clerks, who

crouched over their books as if in fear of his nigh presence, there was an appearance of angry determination about him that did not augur well for the success of the strikers. His thin, tight lips said, "No; he would shut up the mill before he would give in to their impudent interference with his business. No"—and here he smothered an oath—"he would even burn the mill, if that were necessary to insure his triumph over a set of lawless miscreants who thought to browbeat him into submission."

William Marsh was a very positive, domineering man about his mill. Vulgarity would have called him, with more truth than elegance, pig-headed. Here he ruled with a will as inflexible as a piece of shafting, with an authority as unyielding as the frames of his looms, and with a heart as visible as that of a bobbin. But he understood working-people thoroughly; most certainly he thought so, judging from the angular rigidity with which he carried out his views. His best way of getting along with them was to keep them down by having as little intercourse as possible with them, and giving them to understand, first, last and all the time, that his only obligation to them was to pay their wages, and their bounden duty to him was to earn those wages to the very last cent. As to wages, that was a question that never caused him the slightest deliberation—at least, on the side of an advance. He knew what he could afford to pay; therefore he should be, and was, the sole judge of the rate of wages; and if times were such that he could get working-people at rates even below those which he could afford, it was most assuredly his privilege and duty so to do as a prudent and shrewd capitalist. If the working-people could not get high wages, he argued, they ought to be satisfied with low ones. Any wages, of course, were better than none. Let these spendthrifts, who were always in debt, no matter how much they were paid, live within their wages, he said—buy fewer good clothes and less rich food. It's the extravagance of the working-people, he asserted, that had brought on the hard times. The country is rich enough. It's the fault of the working-classes that they are poor. If they had been economical and saving, they would not be in want

now, and trying, as they were, to make up for their extravagance and neglect by robbing capitalists of their hard savings and foresighted accumulations.

Thoroughly imbued with these one-sided ideas of his responsibilities, William Marsh had, so far as profits were concerned, run his mill successfully. He had made money—lots of it; but he had made no friends. He was known on 'Change as a very keen man, a shrewd buyer, a sharp seller. Men smiled on him for trade and fawned on him for credit. But no one spoke kindly of him, only talked of him as they would of some patent machine for making money, and a most difficult machine out of which to extract it. Nor was his employé's opinion of him such as one would like to have inserted in an obituary notice—provided his heirs were so pleased with his will as to give him a respectable post-mortem character. The working-people about William Marsh never looked for the friendly recognition of his eyes as they glided by him. They would sooner have expected to see the spark of sympathy glowing in those of a dead mackerel. They never came to him for advice or guidance or any request, however small. They would sooner have gone into the engine-room and told their troubles to the fly-wheel, and for rest laid their tired hearts on the great whirling belt. No; they readily saw the line of non-intercourse he had drawn between them, and the young from fear, and the older from contempt, never overstepped it. All avoided him as if, like an enemy, he were safest at a distance. Thus they worked for him, caring as little for his success in this world and the next as he did for theirs.

Such was William Marsh at his mill, on 'Change, and on the street. At home he was another man—ruled, not ruling; his manners subdued, his words few and peaceful. A brilliant illustration of the fact was he that the tyrant abroad is a slave at home. Henpecked he was, and most vigorously, and this, being known at the mill by some process of social telegraphy, was no little satisfaction and consolation to his employé's. They regarded Mrs. Marsh as a providential avenger of his harshness to them, and derived some daily comfort from their knowledge that, snub and harass them as he might, when he reached home

he would receive the same measure of tyranny he had meted out to them. Just now, the hands at Marsh's mill were discomfiting their employer very much as his wife had done in the early years of their matrimonial life, before he had learned who was master at the fireside; for a controlling authority soon asserted itself there, with two temperaments so uncongenial and warlike beneath the same roof. His wife's contests with him had been successful. It had been a long series of engagements, in which he had retreated from citadel to citadel, to find his supply of courage growing less and less and his powers of resistance weaker. But he unconditionally surrendered at last. In all disputes now she had but to say "William!" in that peculiar intonation of voice, with a slow and rising inflection, and he ceased to argue, became as docile as a lamb, and gave up his opinion as quickly as a dog does a bone when a stronger antagonist comes upon him. The conflict of authority at the mill had not as yet been so successful on the part of his opponents. To be sure, the weavers had gone out and left their looms idle just in the midst of a large and profitable contract. But new hands, driven by poverty and despair, were daily applying, in large numbers, for work at any price, so that they might live, and there was a prospect that the looms would soon be running despite the watchful attempts of the strikers to prevent it. And now, to add to the complications of the situation for the proprietor, he had been told this morning by his confidential clerk, Silas Roe, that the picking- and carding- and spinning-rooms were getting ready to strike if the weaving-room should be run with new hands.

"Let them strike, and starve! What do I care?" said William Marsh with a curl of his thin, clean-shaven lip. "I have a mind to discharge them all this very day."

"Don't you think it would be good policy," asked Silas Roe with a timid inclination of his head and a hesitating tone in his voice, "to take the weavers back until we finish this contract, and then gradually weed them out, putting in their places good hands upon whom we can rely?"

"Not a bit of it—not a bit of it! I'll have my way if

I have to summon police-officers to protect me in my rights. Things have come to a fine pass in this country when a man cannot employ whom he will! But I'll do it if I sink every dollar I've got in the attempt. Some one has got to take a firm stand against this spirit of communism—which I prophesied long ago would come—and I am that man. So, let them do their worst, I'll be ready for them; and that they may thoroughly understand with whom they have to deal, you can at dinner-hour tell the foremen what I have just said."

"Yes; that will be the best thing to do," said Silas Roe, changing his opinion with his usual promptness to suit that of his employer, for he had at present very much at stake with this man. "These working-people ought to be shown just where they stand in relation to capital. I don't know of anybody better able to cope with them than you are, Mr. Marsh. You always did have the knack of managing them and keeping them down to their work."

"I'll show them the power of capital as well as its rights. The lesson will be one they'll remember for many a day. They'll find out to their sorrow the difference between starving and living;" and a smile of threatening evil played over his face as he dismissed his clerk with a wave of his hand and resumed his occupation with the papers upon his desk.

Silas Roe went back to his ledger in the adjoining room. As he leaned over this book, which told of a year's heavy profits, he muttered, away down in his heart:

"A meaner man than he never owned a dollar! I would wish to be poor all my life if I had to make my money as he has done, by grinding everybody down and treating human beings as if they were cattle, to toil and sweat and stagger under burdens too heavy to carry. Thank Heaven he'll get paid for it some day!—if not here, in the Hereafter. The more I see of such men, the more certain am I of another world, where we poor devils shall get even with them. There will not be any close-fisted capitalists in heaven, that's certain! And to think that so hard-hearted a man should have so sweet a daughter as Harriet! Harriet!"

As he murmured this name his face relaxed into a softer

expression. He drew from his pocket a photograph, upon which he was soon gazing so absorbedly that he forgot all else save that this dear face was his own—that of his affianced wife, whose wedding-day was already fixed. The wedding-day! Oh, day of days! His mind went off on such a sweet and glorious ramble with hope and love and joy—those fleet-footed rovers of youthful hearts—that he was not easily called back to his matter-of-fact surroundings by the voice at his elbow. It was only when his arm was gently touched that he started, and turning saw standing beside him a young man with hat and valise in hand. Already the other clerks were quizzically regarding this new comer with askant looks over their shoulders, while their pens went on sputtering with a semblance of work for the benefit of the ears of the stern man in the little back office.

“What do you want?” asked Roe with something of the quick, impatient manner of his employer. “Come to answer that advertisement? Well, you’ll find Mr. Marsh in that room,” jerking his head in the designated direction and turning again to his ledger, between the leaves of which he had deftly slipped the photograph.

The young man went to the room thus curtly pointed out with a hesitating step and apprehensive face, which told full well how confused he was by the strangeness of his surroundings and agitated by the cool indifference of his reception, and knocked with a fearful faintness upon the door. It was with difficulty he could summon resolution to push it open in response to the quick, gruff summons to come in. As he did so, and entered, he saw a face so cold and vacant looking up at him that his hopes quickly descended far below the freezing-point, and he stood irresolute and silent.

“What do you want?”

The same question that had been asked him in the other room, the same harsh, rasping tone, only more suggestive now of the power of refusal.

“I have come to answer your advertisement—”

“Is that all?” interrupted the man with an impatient fling of the hand. “Then you can wait till I am ready to attend to you. I haven’t time just now to talk about

so small a matter;" and he returned to his writing with an absorption as complete as if his visitor were a thousand miles away.

The young man, not daring to set down his valise or take a seat—for he had not been asked to do either, though he looked dusty and tired—stood waiting, it seemed to him an age, for Mr. Marsh to speak to him again. But the pen scratched on as monotonously as if it were writing the world's will with a hundred codicils attached, and the man's face, as Volney watched it with something of a feeling akin to awe, grew more and more repellent, the sharp features more scornful, as if a small volcano of wrath were gradually pushing itself to the surface. At last the pen was thrown aside with an air of triumph. Folding up what he had written, the mill-owner put it in a large envelope, and, directing this, struck sharply upon a bell that stood upon the table. Its summons was quickly answered by Silas Roe, to whom Mr. Marsh gave the package, saying,

"Take this down to the office of the *Courier*. Tell them I want it published in to-morrow's issue. It is time these working-people got a quietus through the public press. This article will show them up in their true colors as the enemies of law and order. If the proprietors of the *Courier* should refuse to publish this, you can stop my advertisement. I'll support no paper that goes against my interests and the welfare of society. That's all; go!" and Silas went.

Then turning to the youthful stranger, who felt very much by this time as if he had been entrapped into a lion's den, he said, looking through and over him, a favorite method of his in the inspection of working-people,

"So you want work bad enough to come after it, do you? That's a good sign—shows you are not waiting for somebody to come along and put bread and butter into your mouth for nothing. Who are you? Where did you come from?"

"My name, sir, is Slade. I have come from the country. I—"

"Oh, from the country, are you? That's a bad sign—very bad. Shows an unsteady character when a man of

your age leaves his home to wander around cities. Tired of hard work and looking for some easy job, I suppose? But you have come to the wrong place if you expect to earn money here without working hard for it."

"I am willing to work hard, sir, if you will only give me a chance."

"Yes, of course," broke in the other with a sneer; "that's what you all say. But when you're given a chance you never improve it, except to make war upon the hand that feeds you. You look meek enough now, but you would join a strike, I suppose, as soon as any of them."

Volney Slade's face flushed. He drew himself up with a quiet dignity and looked the man steadily in the eye, while upon his lips trembled a bold and contemptuous reply to this insulting speech. But prudence gained the mastery over his courage, and after a pause he replied in a voice that trembled with the feeling he could not wholly repress:

"I am sorry, sir, you condemn me without a trial. However I may appear to you now, I am sure of one thing—that if employed by you I can show myself grateful to my employer at all times and in all places."

"That's a very good speech, but I have heard it often before. They all talk that way. Gratitude! I have been employing people the last twenty years, and I have never yet seen any of it. Gratitude! It sounds well alongside of committees and dictation and threats and strikes. Well, what do you know about machinery?"

"Nothing practically, sir, but I am sure I could soon learn to be of service to you."

"Ah, indeed!" raising his eyebrows with an ironical smile. "You think you could soon learn and be of service, do you? What then? Why, you would go off and leave me in the lurch for some situation where you could get fifty cents more a week. I would teach you, and somebody else would get the benefit of my trouble. That I have done a great many times. It's a phase of gratitude with which I am very familiar."

"I hope the ingratitude of others will not keep you from giving me a trial," pleaded Volney, for he began to

feel that the promise of this situation was fast slipping from him. "I will do my best to please you."

"How much wages do you expect?" asked the man after a short silence, in which he had been critically surveying with his steel-gray eyes the entire form of his visitor, as if he were a new machine on inspection.

"Whatever you choose to pay. Wages are not so much an object with me as learning the trade."

"The old story again. Wages no object now, but as soon as you have learned something, then the wages will be everything and the trade nothing. Another phase of gratitude, with which I am also acquainted. Are you married?"

"No, sir."

"That's so much in your favor. You can live on less and work with better attention. Marriage is the bane of workingmen. They marry before they are able to support wives and children. What is the consequence? Why, their wives and children die by thousands, fill our almshouses and go begging in droves along our streets. A poor man ought to stay single. It is his duty to himself, to his employer and to society. You have nobody dependent on you—no father or mother, or brother or sister?"

"No, sir; I have only my own living to make."

"That's another thing in your favor. Shows that you have not looked upon this mill as an almshouse, out of which you expect to feed and clothe a herd of relatives at my expense. Well, I will give you a trial and see how good you can make your promises of gratitude and devotion. You may prove an exception to the rule, though I doubt it."

"I am very much obliged to you," said Volney, drawing a sigh of relief, and his eyes brightening for the first time since he had entered the room. "I know I shall not disappoint you."

"Report to me a week from to-day. A place will be ready for you at that time. Your wages will be six dollars a week. You can get board anywhere around here for four dollars. That will leave you a good margin for savings. At the end of six months, if you prove your-

self capable, industrious and sober, I will add four dollars a week to your wages, and increase them from year to year as you become valuable. Now I have given you a chance, despite my first impressions of you. Report here in a week, and let me see how much you deserve my kindness. You can go now," abruptly motioning toward the door.

The young man hesitated a moment, and then began to give expression to his thankfulness in stammering words, yet words as earnest as the gratitude he really felt. The situation was his at last. He had a chance for fortune now. His dreams were coming true. These thoughts so confused him with their sudden rush of joy that he forgot for the instant where he was. The tears blinded his eyes. He put up his hand to brush them away, and did not see the man impatiently beckoning him to be gone.

"Come, start along," said Mr. Marsh, "and keep that keen edge on your gratitude till I see you again. And another thing: when you leave here, go straight to your home. Don't loiter around this mill, or have a word to say to any of the hands as to who you are or what your business is, or what I have said to you. If you do, you will lose your situation, that's all. Go!"

Once outside the mill, Volney found that he would have to press his way through a small group of determined men and women who stood about the door and put themselves in his path as if they would hold a parley with him. They were a committee of striking weavers, who were waiting for an audience with their late employer. They had been selected by their associates to make one more appeal to him to be taken back at the old wages, which they were armed with arguments and facts to prove were barely sufficient to obtain the necessities of life. No wonder these men and women, feeling they were engaged in an unequal contest for what they thought their rights, looked upon this newcomer with scowling faces and threatening eyes. They surmised full well what had been his errand, and with an intuition quick as the deft fingers of their hands they saw by the confident, satisfied look on his face that he had been successful.

"I say, my friend," spoke a tall, brawny, brown-bearded man, striding after Volney, who was congratulating him-

self upon having escaped the group unquestioned, and laying a huge, sinewy, bare arm upon his shoulder, "have you been hunting for work in there?"

"That's a question I cannot answer," replied Volney with all the firmness he could command in his voice, and looking up with an unsteady gaze at the begrimed face that towered above him—a face soiled with dust and oil and perspiration, yet with features as sharply defined as if they were lines of steel, and with eyes that glowed as steadily as the fires that burned in the furnace the man had left but a moment ago.

"Why can't you answer it?" demanded he, with a trifle of menace in his voice. "Are you ashamed to tell that you have been trying to steal our living from us, sneaking around here to get a job that don't belong to you, and never shall?"

"My business is my own," asserted Volney with a dignity that for an instant surprised the man.

Then, quickly shaking off the other's hold, he turned rapidly away, and left the man looking after him with brows that lowered more and more as the head shook itself with slow threatening gestures.

"What did he say, Reddie?" asked several of the group, running up to where he stood still silently gazing after the retreating form.

"Say!" repeated the machinist with a mocking laugh as he tossed his head contemptuously in the direction of the mill. "Why, he said just what old bobbin-scraper yonder will say when we go in to see him: 'None of your business!' What other answer do you want than that? It's short and sweet, isn't it? What better salt do you poor devils ask to put in your porridge? None of your business! as the hangman said to the fellow on the gallows;" and he laughed on louder than before.

A hollow and harsh laugh it was, but the group understood its meaning, for without a word, only shrugging their shoulders with quiet satisfaction, they followed him, leading the way to the mill.

CHAPTER XXVI.

GETTING READY FOR SOMETHING.

WHATEVER intentions stirred the heart of Nicholas Grundle to-day, he well kept them a secret with his lips, though his elastic step and bright eyes and bustling movements betrayed the fact that he was laboring under an excitement as pleasant and absorbing as it was unusual with him. Long before daylight he had risen from his bed, where he had passed nearly the whole night in planning his cunning scheme. Moving about on tiptoe, lest he should waken the sleeper in the next room, he lighted the candle and began the first work which he had laid out for the day. This was the writing of the deed which was to convey in fee simple the title of his farm to J. Lawrence Adams for the consideration of twenty thousand dollars. Before he had retired he had got together all things necessary for his task, so that they were ready at his hand now as he seated himself at the little table. There was fresh ink in the bottle, and a new goose-quill, and before him lay spread open his own deed—a dingy yellow parchment. Alongside of this document was the blank deed, taken from a bundle of similar legal papers ready for filling out and executing, a supply of which, by some strange foresight, he purchased years ago, though never until now had he occasion to use one of them. He was an odd sight bending over the table, his eyes brighter than the light of many candles such as this, though the hand which held the pen was at first as unsteady as the flickering flame. Avarice soon gave it a steadier grasp, and he wrote on in firm, bold letters, copying word after word without hesitation or error. Several times he stopped and pushed back the locks of his white hair, that fell athwart his vision when he leaned too closely to the paper. Once he held his pen in suspense and turned his eyes with a sharp gaze in the direction of the window. But it was only the branch of a tree swayed by the wind that had touched the easement, and not the hand of prowler, spy or thief.

When his task was at last finished, and he had signed

his name with a smile that rippled out in a suppressed chuckle, the daylight was already coming into the room. The shadows by which he had been surrounded had vanished like spirits of the night, and the candle at his side was but a tiny spot of yellow light, sickly wavering in the gleam of day. Quickly snuffing the candle, he folded the deeds, the new one in creases exactly like those of the old, and stowed them in the capacious pocket of his coat. He made his way down stairs, rapping on Emily's door and cheerily calling to her in a voice as happy as that which bore back her morning greeting. When he reached the bottom of the little stairway, Cæsar stood waiting for him, and licked his hands with a whine of recognition. The old man stooped and spoke to him softly and patted his head—something he had not done these three days past, as Cæsar well remembered. Followed by the dog, he groped his way across the dark room and threw open a shutter. In another instant his eyes were on the cellar-door, and then on the corner where the valise had been left the night before. The door was closed; the valise was still there. He tried the door; it was locked. He crept over to the valise, and slowly pulling aside the carpet shook the valise with his hand. It was just as heavy as when he had tried its weight again and again before going to bed. He examined the padlock. It lay in the same position in which he had placed it for the detection of the slightest movement. The treasure was still in his possession. Anxiety no longer clouded his countenance. The old covetous smile came back with swift intensity. He stood trembling with joy, looking down upon the valise with rapt eagerness in his face, as if he could not wait another moment for its contents to be revealed. At last, restraining himself with a sigh of impatience, he slowly dropped the carpet over it and walked away, rubbing his hands in silent glee. Of course he had known it was safe enough, for who could have touched it in the night without his hearing the slightest sound? Nevertheless, sure as he was of its custody, it was so reassuring and so exhilarating to see it again.

He now threw open all the shutters, started a fire, and again calling Emily went out to the little barn faster than

he had ever gone in that direction since the day of his first taking possession of the place. The cow was startled indeed by the briskness with which he opened the door and the unusual quantity of cut feed he soon threw into her manger. Even the hens that flew down at his feet from all quarters of the barn were no less astonished than old Brindle at the plentiful supply of corn he scattered among them. What had come over him, that he gave them now in one meal that which he had formerly doled out in three? Another time he would have doubted his own sanity for doing so. Brindle could not understand it, for she had suddenly stopped eating, and turning her head was looking at him in a very questioning way out of her great brown eyes. And the hens, too, cocked up their heads at him, and winked their eyes and clucked inquiringly, as if they too would like some solution to this sudden lavishness of food. For answer he gave them a shrill laugh followed by a series of chuckles as he tossed more corn among them; and climbing the mow with the agility of a boy, he threw down into the rack of Brindle's manger such a huge pile of hay that she tugged at her chain as if she thought all the contents of the floor were coming down upon her. Hurrying from the barn, he went back to the house, skipping and trotting by turns, his face all aglow with his strange excitement. Meeting Emily at the door, he cried out, catching her in his arms and kissing her,

"Good-morning, my child! Your eyes are bright, and so are mine. Ah! who cannot be joyful when good fortune is coming to them? It is the heart's best medicine; and the bigger the dose, the better, say I. Breakfast not ready yet?" he continued, glancing at the table, which she had just placed in position, with only the cloth spread upon it. "So much the better, for while you are getting it I will go over to O'Hara's. I have some business with him that is best settled this morning before he is off to his work. Take care, my child, while I am gone, that no one enters our cottage. I will be in sight of you all the time from this door. Should anybody come, you can signal to me with a towel. Caesar, there, will help you keep watch." He caught up his cane—a quaintly-twisted hickory—and

with a cautious shake of his head and finger at her started at a brisk pace down the garden-path.

The girl gazed after him with a puzzled look upon her anxious face. What was the matter with her father, so changed in a day in all his ways? If he had acted strangely the day before, he was certainly acting more so now. This was the first time since the housekeeper's death that he had ever left her alone or out of his hearing save yesterday, when he had sent her with the locket to the farm-house. What business could he have with O'Hara, a man she had seen him more than once order away from the place with curses and threats? What if bodily harm should befall him? she asked herself with a little start of apprehension as she saw him leap across the brook and clamber rapidly up the hill on which the cottage of O'Hara stood, in a clearing in full view half a mile away.

Excited by her doubts and apprehensions, she called Cæsar to her side. He reluctantly left his watch by the valise to come to her. As he did so she stooped down, and laying her hand upon his head pointed in the direction of O'Hara's, saying in a voice so earnest that the dog pricked up his ears and gazed steadfastly across the fields, growling assent, as it were, to her words,

"Cæsar, yonder is your dear, good master. If I should tell you to go to him, you must run faster, dear Cæsar, than ever you ran for me. Will you?" The dog wagged his tail a dozen times for "Yes!"

Meanwhile, Nicholas Grundle had reached the cottage of O'Hara. He had no need to announce his coming, for already a crowd of little O'Haras, standing in the doorway, had welcomed him with a series of yells, from the faint treble of the baby to the whoop of the largest boy. Now, as he drew nearer, they were shrinking away and holding fast to each other for mutual protection. Although there was a smile on his face, it was so grim and full of wrinkles they took it for a frown such as Jack the Giant-Killer might have worn.

"The top o' the mornin' to ye, Mister Grumble," said a broad, jolly-faced woman, coming to the door and planting herself like a huge tower of defence in the midst of

her children, who, taking fresh courage, began to look up at him with quizzical expressions and half-subdued laughter, as if he were some big jack-in-the-box who had popped up before them. "Shurely there must be money in the fields this mornin' to bring the likes of ye out so airly. Is it Dennis ye want? He's at the barn beyant. Mind ye spake to him civilly, Mister Grumble, for Dennis has his bad blood b'ilin' hard this mornin'. It's a dispute I've bin havin' wid him, an' shure it's the wurst o' the argument he's got. So keep a civil tongue in yer head, Mister Grumble."

The old man turned away and went to the barn with a contemptuous toss of his head, which elicited from Mrs. O'Hara a loud and derisive remark, and from the children a chorus of yells. Here he found Dennis with one of his eyes in a state of inflammation that aptly illustrated one phase of getting the worst of a matrimonial argument.

"Mr. O'Hara," he said with a nod of recognition and coming immediately to business, "can you keep a secret?"

"If it's worth the kapin', I can kape it safe as ye kape yer piles of goold, Mister Grundle, or Mister Grumble, or whatever yer name may be," replied the Irishman with something of a sneer in his good-humored laugh.

"The secret is not a great one," resumed Grundle; "but if kept, it will be worth more to you than if told."

"Will it, indade? Thin my mouth will be like a bell without a clapper for yer secret. So spake on, soft and aisy;" and the man drew nearer to him. "The ould woman beyant has ears like the sky, that catches every sound a-goin', an' lets thim out ag'in like a pourin' rain."

"Can you bring your horse and cart to my place to-morrow morning at five o'clock?" asked the miser, in a semi-whisper, cautiously peering over his shoulder to anticipate Mrs. O'Hara's approach.

"Ov coorse I ken. At midnight, if ye like."

"No; at five o'clock, rain or shine—remember, rain or shine," repeated Grundle, casting his eyes around the sky, which was already portending rain.

"An' is that all yer sacret, Mr. Grumble?"

"It's as much, I'll warrant, as you can keep," muttered

the other with a suggestive nod of his head in the direction of the dwelling, at the corner of which stood Mrs. O'Hara, regarding them with arms akimbo. "And," he added, suddenly lowering his voice to the faintest whisper, "if you can bring some ready cash with you, Mr. O'Hara, I can sell you the cow and other things so cheap that you will make a good deal of money out of your bargains. This is another secret for you to keep." Then, elevating his voice, so that the woman might hear, and drolly winking at the man, he cried, "Good-morning, then, Mr. O'Hara! Since you will not sell your horse and wagon, of course I cannot buy them."

"Is it for buyin' the horse an' wagon ye came?" yelled the woman after him as he started off. "Shure, ye wud be chatin' Dennis out o' his eyes wid me standin' by him. Nayther horse nor wagon ye will git, ye ould goold-pincher! Go 'long wid ye, ye dhirty ould miser! Shure, the likes of ye wud part wid a blessin' any day fur a penny!"

The miser paid no heed to this parting salute, which grew less and less distinct as he hastened away. Compliments of this nature were so usual with him that they had lost all power to arrest his attention. His eyes were fastened on the door of his cottage, which had never been out of his sight for more than an instant during his brief absence. He saw Emily still standing in the doorway where he had left her. He waved his hand in greeting to her as he hurried along, brandishing his cane, and now and then giving vent to his happy feelings in snatches of songs that were broken as the treble of his voice, but gay as the flow of his thoughts. When he reached his home he made no allusion to where he had been or the object of his going, and to Emily's questioning looks he replied only with a cheery laugh and a pat upon her cheek.

"Some day soon I will tell you all," he said, seating himself at the table, where she had silently followed him, unable to conceal her look of disappointment at his reticence. "This much I will tell you now: good fortune is coming to us. That is what makes me so happy; and it must make you happy, too, my little woman-child. Ah!

I knew our life would not be always under a cloud. I was sure the sun would shine as brightly for us as it does for others not half so worthy. Clouds will pass away; the sun must shine to-morrow, if not to-day. There is always more blue sky than black, and our sky shall soon be all blue."

Thus he rattled on through the meal, his spirits so buoyant that the girl, despite his equivocal refusals to answer any of her questions as to what their coming good fortune might be, caught the contagion of his hopeful merriment, and happy anticipations drove every shadow from her face. It must be, she thought, the best of fortunes coming to them that made him so joyful, so very unlike himself, with that constant smile upon his face and the happy look in his eyes. Yet her heart now asked, with a secret sigh, as her father left the table and went up the stairs, what was any good-fortune for her compared to the love of him who was far away—whose image grew brighter in her soul with every hour of separation? The world could give her no good fortune unless it were that of his loving heart. Oh, if she only knew whether she should see him again—whether, as his mother had said, he would soon come back to tell her how much he loved her! If he should come back—and her heart whispered he would—what then? Why, she would forgive him even before he could ask her. Forgive him! What had she to forgive, when it was she herself who had made him angry? No, no; it was not his fault. To be sure, he had gone away in anger from her; but she was to blame, and she would tell him this and promise never to annoy him so again. With these and many loving thoughts that brought the softest look into her eyes and the daintiest blush upon her cheeks, she rose from her chair and went about her little round of household work.

Her tranquil and happy heart made every task so light and the time fly so fast that it seemed but a few moments before the morning duties were performed and she found herself sitting by the fireplace, with her knitting in her hands, waiting for her father to come down and begin the instructions of the day. What kept him so long in his room, moving about so quietly she could just hear his

light footsteps as he now and then crossed the floor above her head? This question, like many others that had puzzled her little brain this morning, she could not answer. Whatever he was doing, it was something, she felt, he was trying to keep secret from her; for when he entered the room, she remembered he turned the key in the lock—a signal, he had often told her, that meant he wished to be alone; that she must neither come near him nor ask him what he had been doing. Suddenly—just how or why she never could tell—her thoughts left her father and went speeding across the fields to the farm-house; and with her thoughts went her eyes, for in full view of the window where she sat was that house around which already the fondest hopes of her heart were clustering. It was there Volney's mother lived. That was the place to which he should soon return. There, perhaps, she would meet him again. Perhaps—and her heart gave a little throb of joy—it might be her home with him some day, too.

What was the dark object she saw moving away from the house and coming swiftly down to the pine woods where she and his mother had met? She rose from her chair and eagerly gazed at this object. To her keen sight it soon revealed itself as a woman—a woman dressed in black. Was it his mother? How she longed to meet that sweet, gentle woman again who had talked so kindly and hopefully to her! The woman had disappeared in the woods now, but as Emily's eyes still rested with a longing and loving expression on the spot where she had vanished she saw her appear again a few moments later. This time her pace was even quicker, and she came rapidly down along the bank of the brook toward the willow copse. Reaching this, she stood motionless, evidently looking intently in the direction of Nicholas Grundle's cottage. The watcher by the window, whose heart was loudly beating now, thought she saw the woman raise her hand with a beckoning motion, holding some small white object in it. Was it a letter, and from him? And was his dear, good mother bringing it to her? The girl could hardly control her agitation. These questions made her heart flutter and her head grow dizzy. What should she

do? Already her knitting had fallen upon the floor, and she stood trembling and irresolute. But love is ever stronger than fear. Although every hesitating step she took was made harder by the fear of her father, whose distant tread seemed to sound in her ears like some dreadful warning, she reached the door and opened it.

The woman still stood, statue-like, in the willow copse. Nor did she make any motion of recognition as Emily appeared in the doorway. Only, as before, she slowly raised her hand with the white pareel in it, and then, lowering her arm, outlined the object more visibly against the dark background of her dress. This she did several times; then, slowly moving to the fallen tree-trunk, she stooped and laid the white thing upon it. This done she looked back at Emily, turned away, and went on across the fields in the direction of the village. At this moment Cæsar, who, unknown to his mistress, had been an attentive observer of this pantomime, darted from the house. Before the girl could summon her voice to call him back he had reached the willow copse, and was already bounding toward her with something white between his teeth. Leaping upon the step, he laid an envelope at her feet with a joyous bark, as if he knew how happy its possession would make her. For a moment she could only fall upon her knees, and with hands convulsively clasped gaze down upon it, reading its superscription with eyes suffused with tears of joy. No need to tell her this was a letter from him. She would have known his writing had she seen it anywhere in the wide, wide world. With a hesitation she could not understand, and with blushes that came she knew not why, she put out her hand with a tender gesture to take up the letter. But while her hand was hovering over it, another hand than hers, wrinkled and bloodless—that of her father she saw it was—reached over her shoulder and plucked the letter from her very grasp.

CHAPTER XXVII.

STURDY LOVE NOT SO EASILY REPULSED.

WITH the first consciousness of requited love a woman enfolds herself in a sweet reserve and tender mystery. Wishing to conceal her sacred happiness from the rude gaze of the world, she wraps her face and heart in the veil of secrecy, and in the sweet nurture of silence watches with breathless joy the growth of her passion, filling the soul with a rapture too precious for expression. On the contrary, a man, as soon as he has found out that his love has been successful, suddenly loses the reticence of manner which characterized the pursuit of the object of his affections. His smiling face and confident bearing plainly tell the world, always curious enough in such matters, that he is no longer in doubt—that pursuit has ended in possession, the heart of his choice has been won.

So it was with Rader Craft. No sooner had he left the Green Tree Inn, where Dibbs had assured him of the extremely favorable reception of his letter by Aziel Loyd, than he began to walk with an air of spruceness and an elasticity of step that made him look ten years younger. And his countenance—how it beamed! Always smiling, it was now a benediction on every one he passed, as if he were saying from the depths of his generous heart, “God bless you, fellow-travelers! May you be as happy as I am!”

Yet not one of those he met guessed the real cause of the gratification which this morning enveloped him in such an atmosphere of benignity and salubrious kindness. To be sure, he had always borne himself toward the people of Slowville with a gracious and affectionate manner. He had been a friend to the fatherless, a consoler of widows and an adviser in all good works, temporal and spiritual. But to-day his great heart seemed unable to restrain the most pronounced exhibition of his tenderness and goodwill. He stooped on his way to his office and kissed a little child, holding it in his arms with such a paternal caress that the action brought the tears to the eyes of Mrs.

Boozer, who was fondly watching him from behind the curtain of her room. A step farther on he patted an orphan boy upon the head and put into his hand a silver piece that sparkled bright as Mrs. Boozer's tears. Again he halted to speak cheering words to one of the town poor, who had come in from the almshouse on an errand to the village store. Oh, he could gather all the world into his warm embrace to-day!

"What a seraph he is! A perfect cherubim!" said Mrs. Boozer with a hysterical sob. "Oh, if Boozer had been like him, how I could a-loved him! Yes, Rader Craft, you are an angel; you only need wings for to waft you to the spirits-land."

Neither Mrs. Boozer, who was a woman who prided herself "on finding out things," nor any of those he had met this morning, had any idea of the cause of the lawyer's exuberant friendship, so conspicuously and variously displayed; and he went into his office carrying his joyous secret with him, though he wished every soul in Slowville knew it this very day—ay, this very hour. Giving vent to his happiness in a series of ponderous sighs, he sank into his chair. He folded his hands with a complacent smile and gazed up at the ceiling, murmuring Aziel's name in softest tones, his fat lips pressed in the semblance of a passionate kiss. A long time he sat thus in a delicious reverie, as if he were drinking in the nectar of the fabled gods and breathing the soft and rich perfume of the Elysian fields, his soul floating in an atmosphere of ethereal bliss. What was the law to him now? or the sordid things of earth—its bickerings and its quarrels, its fame or its fortune? He was in love—in love with a woman whose angelic form had filled his heart from the very instant his eyes had first caught a glimpse of her in the village church. Ah! how well he remembered that time when a passing breeze, like the breath of heaven itself, had come through the window above the pew where she was sitting and tossed aside her veil! It was then he saw for the first time those heavenly eyes, those carnation cheeks, those ruby lips and pearly teeth. It was only a moment he had gazed upon her thus, but that moment, with the inspiration of love, had instantaneously pictured upon the chamber of his soul

her eternal photograph. And now she was his—his despite the long months of doubt and anxiety; his after so many chilling fears that she would be lost to him; for he had no means of communicating his passion to her save by the hasty and ravishing glance of his eyes as they peered through her veil when she swept past him into the church or evaded him as she came down the aisle. Strange he had not sooner seen that her avoidance of him was only a womanly reserve, waiting for his more pronounced advances—a secret sign to him that if he would win her he must woo her with something more than simple and fleeting looks of admiration. And so he had. Yes! He had stormed the citadel of her heart with only a pen for his weapon, and had taken it captive by a few plain words. What a powerful letter that was!

“Ah! I knew she could not resist me,” he exclaimed with a jubilant laugh, rising from his chair and stepping briskly into the room that adjoined his office, where he began to survey himself leisurely in the glass. “A man of position, respectability and means is not to be picked up every day in the matrimonial market by blushing maid, lovely woman or charming widow. Forty-five and slightly bald,” running his hand through his hair and bringing up the side locks over his smooth crown. “Well, forty-five is young—ay, the vigorous stage of life. As for baldness, that is a sign of hereditary disposition or mental activity—in my case, both. And where could you find, my dear Miss Aziel Loyd, a better figure than this—such a formation of anatomical correctness and physical beauty? Solid and well proportioned, a subdued tendency to corpulency giving a rounded symmetry of form. Ah, Craft, you lucky rogue!” giving himself a sly poke in the fatty integument that covered his ribs; “Nature endowed you liberally with the fascinating powers of manly vigor and beauty! No wonder the women of Slowville have long watched you as the most delicious plum in the hymeneal garden. Ladies,” throwing himself proudly back and glancing about him with a look of commiseration, “I am sorry—ay, deeply grieved—to disappoint your aspirations. I would there were more of me, that by a kindly division of myself I might appease

your longings. But no ; it cannot be. It only remains for you, fair dames, to lament the loss of him who could have made your earth a paradise, filling your hearts with an everlasting anthem of joy. Aziel Loyd, the beautiful, the glorious, the seraphic, alone possesses that heart for which you have hoped and sighed in vain !”

His overflowing feelings somewhat relieved by this apostrophe, he came back into his office. He tried to take up his duties for the day, which consisted in the final preparation of a case down on the Court’s list for trial on the morrow. It was useless for him to attempt to study. The law, precedents and evidence in the case jumbled themselves into an inextricable mass. The turgid verbosity of statutes and opinions finally vanished into Love’s lightest fancies. Aziel Loyd’s face gleamed up at him from every page. The vanquishing letter he had written her, and which she had read with the instinctive revelation of her heart, ran through his thoughts with never-ceasing and musical reiteration. Thumpety-bump went his heart. Away his imagination flew with him to the farm-house, and with a thrill of delight he pictured himself sitting by her side. He poured into her listening ears the wondrous story of his passion, which, Minerva-like, had sprung forth from his soul in the full vigor of supernatural growth. His stars ! how gracefully she had yielded to his impetuous assault ! He felt her soft breath upon his cheek ; he heard her murmuring words of tenderness like the cooing of a frightened dove ; and the throbbing of her heart, which lay fluttering with joy upon his manly breast, made his own heart swell with violent expansions of happiness.

In this and similar visions, stretching far out into matrimonial life, the hours sped away. The study of the case was resumed at long intervals, but was soon laid aside again for musing thoughts of love ; and now the bell of the village church rang out twelve o’clock. The dinner-hour had come, yet it had brought to him other thoughts than simply gastronomic ones. The lawyer started from his chair with a frown that had been slowly gathering on his face this last half hour.

“Silence that dreadful bell !” he exclaimed with a dra-

matic flourish of his arm. "It summons me to a most unpleasant duty. In its solemn reverberations I hear the knell of Mrs. Boozer's buried hopes. Ere it peals again she will know that I am lost to her—lost for ever! Would that I could intimate to her the impending calamity in some gentle way, so that when it comes it may fall upon her bleeding heart with less crushing weight. But how to do it? Ay, that is the question which I must now decide. To longer delay were cruelty to her and injustice to myself."

He folded his arms and strode up and down the room, his head bowed and his smile tinged with melancholy. No tender-hearted judge sentencing a prisoner to death could have looked more grave and sad, or yet more fearless of his duty.

"A long while ago I apprehended this result," he said, at length, pensively; "but the responsibility for this misfortune rests not upon me. I extended to her apparent advances no encouragement, nor did I ever toy in pleasing dalliance with the strong evidences of her affection. No, Rader Craft, you are as innocent of deceiving her widowed heart as the new-born babe that sleeps for the first time upon its mother's bosom. And yet, doubtless, she will blame me for it all, and call me, ere to-morrow's sun has set, a base, perfidious wretch; and I must bear her scorn, though I deserve it not. Ah me! what misery comes to man through woman's unsought love!"

He put up his hands with a despairing gesture, and taking his hat went slowly in the direction of the Green Tree Inn, his countenance firm and resolute, though not without a touch of sympathy lingering in his solemn eyes. Mrs. Boozer was waiting for him—yes, watching him through the thin muslin curtain with famishing eyes, as she called them. Ever ready to anticipate the sorrows of his lonely life, her heart was instantly touched by his dejected air. It went out to him in a great, gushing sigh.

"Poor, dear soul!" she murmured, two big tears slowly making their watery lines upon her cheeks; "how awful lonesome he is! No one to love him! Not a heart he can call his own! Dear, dear! if he would only take

mine! Law sakes! I wonder he don't see how I love him. But he's so innocent about women-folks, the dear, overgrown lamb! I've done everything to show him, since he's been a-boarding here, that he can come in any time he wants to and hang up his hat for good. But he don't seem to take. How different from Simon Boozer he is! Poor Simon hung around me like wax; I couldn't drive him away with a club."

The lawyer rapped upon the door. It was a heavy solitary rap he gave, which sounded to him like a miniature crack of doom for the woman he was so soon to confront. Mrs. Boozer pressed love's copious distillation from her eyes, pinched her cheeks for color, and tried to smile with her twitching, quivering lips. She could not summon her tremulous voice to bid him enter, though her famishing eyes yearned for a sight of his fascinating form. Hesitating, blushing and confused she stood, her two hands pressed upon her heart, her eyes bent upon the floor with a maiden's timid glance. He opened the door and came in with a deliberate step. With a measured tread he crossed the room and hung his hat upon the peg. He started a trifle, for on the peg adjoining this one was her bonnet and shawl. Then he turned slowly around and lifted his eyes, and looked, not at her, standing so patiently at the window, but at the dinner-table.

She gave a little cough and advanced a step or two, then suddenly stood still; for the cold, stolid look he cast her, his bare nod of recognition and his frigid smile chilled her heart to its very core.

"Is dinner ready, Mrs. Boozer? I regret I have kept you waiting," he said, drawing out his accustomed chair, his eyes steadily fixed on the smoking leg of mutton, which one of the sisters had just placed upon the table, while the other set down the vegetable-dishes in tasteful array.

"I can always wait for you," she replied, coming forward, with a simper; then, as if suddenly conscious she had spoken too boldly, and assuming an expression of would-be delicate, womanly modesty, she added, stammering and blushing red as the crimson tie at her throat,

"I mean I'm always ready—for—you—Mr. Craft. It's no trouble to wait—for you."

"Ah, indeed!" and the lawyer's face grew ominously calm. "Then, if I may be allowed to express myself with something of a rhetorical flourish, you are pleased, Mrs. Boozer, to exercise in my behalf woman's noblest prerogatives—watching and waiting. Such being the case, my dear madam, pray be seated, and watch my abilities as a carver and wait for some tangible result therefrom."

With the frigidity of his smile a trifle relaxed, he waved her to her seat, and taking his own chair with solemn silence began to carve. But never once did he look up at the two melting eyes that watched him across the table.

"Has anything wrong happened to you this morning, Mr. Craft?" she asked in a timid voice as he proceeded with his meal in a silence she knew was very unusual.

"Why do you propound that proposition?" he replied, his eyes still fixed upon his plate. "Does my deportment indicate that I am the objective receptacle of any calamity?"

"I don't know what you mean. Please don't talk to me in them big words; they hurt my feelings, and they're hurt enough now, with you a-acting so cold to me, as if we was strangers;" and there was a sad reproach and tender pleading in her voice that warned him no longer to delay in turning her heart for ever away from all contemplation of him.

He suddenly looked full in her face. He was about to speak freely to her, but her warm, ardent gaze checked him. His eyes again sought his plate, and he studied a while how best to turn the current of her affections without doing sudden violence thereto. At last he laid down his knife and fork with a smile of satisfaction, and said,

"My dear Mrs. Boozer, you asked me if anything wrong has happened to me. In reply, I would state that nothing wrong has this day crossed the path of my existence. Yet I cannot deny that what might happen to me are things I would most avoid, while things I most desire

might not happen at all. Life, you are well aware, is a season of desires and opportunities by no means coexistent or running parallel with one another. Our existence is mirrored in the piscatorial art—bait and no fish, or fish and no bait. Yes, the common lot of man is disappointment. He sows wisely that which he may never reap, and reaps wisely that which he never sowed. This may be your lot, Mrs. Boozer—it may be mine. But whatever the future has in store for us, let us bear it with stout hearts, even as Ajax of old defied the lightning. Alas, alas! that the sweetest bee should have a sting—the fairest flower a worm!”

“Them is sweet words,” she sighed, looking at him with an admiring smile. “I just love to hear you talk. Them words goes right to my heart. I think a great deal of what you say, Mr. Craft. I know what a good man you are.”

Her voice quivered and her eyes fell away from his with a bashful glance.

“Humph! whew!” exclaimed the lawyer, abruptly rising from the table and snatching his hat from the peg. “I forgot. There is a client waiting for me at the office.”

“Can’t you stay and have some pie?” she asked, rising and standing in front of him in her most beseeching attitude. “It is the lemon-pie you like. I made it myself for you—”

“No, no!” he interrupted, growing paler every instant, as he tried to push by her and release the detaining hand she had put upon his arm. “I can’t wait for any pie. I—I must hurry. Some other time—”

He made a desperate plunge for the door.

“Don’t pull yourself away like that. It hurts my feelings—seems as if you was angry with me,” she pleaded, still holding his arm as he sprang across the floor. “Can’t you bid me good-bye with them soft words you used to use?”

He stopped. His head was giddy, his knees shook and his heart seemed standing still. Was he between the strong horns of that terrible thing, a mental dilemma? Would she never let him go? or would she then and

there force him to an acceptance of her love and call in her sisters to witness the compact?

"Well, I won't keep you any longer now," he heard her saying, her face looking up so close to his frightened eyes. "At supper we will talk this matter all over. I know what you mean, and I'll help you say it. Here's a bunch of red roses," she went on, fumbling at his coat. "I raised them for you on that bush in the window yonder. But they ain't a bit handsomer nor sweeter than you yourself, and I ain't ashamed to tell you so."

A moment later the lawyer found himself in the open air and going on a dead run to his office. Into this he rushed as if closely pursued. Locking the door, he sank breathless into his chair. As his head fell limply upon his breast he saw, with a shudder, three red roses pinned in a bunch upon the lappel of his coat.

"Ah!" he sighed, "how powerless is man against female machinations! It's not an easy matter to tell a woman you do not love her, neither can you subdue her affections by the might of your indifference."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN WHICH SOMETHING UNFORESEEN OCCURS.

THE girl for an instant kneeled trembling and affrighted at her father's feet, though her eyes never once left the letter, the superscription of which he was now examining with a deepening frown. Then, as he made a motion with his hands as if to tear it in pieces, she uttered a cry of dismay, and springing up caught his arm.

"Do not tear it! Please let me have it, father dear!" she pleaded, eagerly putting out her hand and trying to grasp the letter, which he held out of her reach with a little mocking laugh.

"I have a mind to tear it into shreds before either of us can read it," he muttered, shaking his head threateningly at the letter and then reproachfully at her. "But

no; I will not," putting her clinging arms gently away from his neck. "We will both read it, and you shall read it first. See! I can trust you, even if you cannot trust me."

He thrust the letter into her hand and went back into the house, closing the door, and leaving her alone with her treasure in her hands, that trembled so she could hardly hold the missive steadily enough to read again her name, that Volney had written. At last, slowly sinking upon the step, where Cæsar nestled beside her, she laid the letter, still unopened, in her lap, and gazed fondly down upon it. These were delicious moments of hesitation. It was his first letter to her. In it were words his loving hand alone had traced. There were so many things she hoped he might have written—there was so much he might tell her of his still true love—that she dare not yet break the seal for fear that that for which her heart was hoping was not within those precious folds.

Still delaying to open it, she pressed the little package to her heart and covered it with many tender kisses, feeling all the more, as his cherished image floated distinct in the mist of her eyes, that in this secret messenger his heart had indeed come back to her. When at last she had opened the letter and read it with a heart that throbbed and fluttered at every word, she could have cried for very joy. She did, too, the tears falling faster than she could brush them away from eyes that read again and again his loving words, which grew richer and deeper in meaning as she repeated them in gentle whispers. How full to overflowing was her soul! Its happiness was like some great burden, which she felt herself too weak alone to bear. She must run and tell her father. He must share her joy with her, and make it more tranquil by his sharing. He would be so glad to know that what he had prophesied had all come true. For had he not told her that her lover would yet come back to her? In her ecstasy of happiness she caught Cæsar's head in her arms and told him far more of her secret than he could understand, though he wagged his tail and looked so knowing.

Then she ran, with the open letter in her hand, in search of her father, her lips parted with a little smile of triumph,

while her eyes, flashing with delight, vied in brilliancy with the flushing tide that glowed upon her cheeks. She found him sitting in front of the fireplace, in his old arm-chair, with her stool beside it. He did not turn his head as she entered nor look up at her as she bounded toward him and, throwing her arms about his neck, laid the letter in his lap.

"Read it, father dear," she murmured with a touch of fear in her voice, for her manner had suddenly lost its joyousness as she saw how grave and silent he was. "It is just as you said. He has asked me to—to forgive him."

He took up the letter with seeming indifference, motioning her to sit beside him. She did so, looking into his face with a mingled expression of childish trust and apprehension. Never once did his eyes turn to hers, so questioningly fixed upon him, neither did he utter a word. He read the letter in perfect silence and with a slow attentiveness, but no opinion as to its contents was reflected in any feature of his stolid countenance.

"It has happened as I said it would," he quietly remarked, slowly refolding the missive and handing it back to her. "He has asked you to forgive him; and you will, I suppose?" for the first time turning his keen gray eyes upon her with something of an expression of pity gleaming through their cold gaze.

"Oh, I could forgive him a thousand times!" she replied with an enthusiasm as free and artless as herself, clasping the letter with a passionate gesture to her bosom. "If he will only love—"

Her voice died away and she was suddenly silent. His quick frown had checked her utterance and driven back from her lips the eager words she would have spoken.

"What is love?" he said with a low, cynical laugh, speaking more to himself than to her. "It is ice with the sun on it, honey mingled with gall, a pleasure that comes and goes with pain. What is woman's love? It is a breath that changes quicker than the wind. And man's? He breaks his vows with the parting kiss still warm upon his lips. And so you think he loves you?"

looking half sorrowfully down upon her upturned face, that lay upon his knee.

"Something tells me that he does," she faltered, drooping her eyes away from him and blushing deeply at the words that had escaped her lips.

"The old story!" he said, slowly rising from his chair and resting his hand with a gentle pressure upon her head. "When love comes in at the door, judgment flies out of the window. I shall not chide you further, child. It's not your fault that your innocent heart believes in him. But do not trust him more than you do me. Words are the cheapest gifts the heart can offer. True love, such as my child deserves, was not born in a day. It is the growth of years. So let us wait and see. Nothing is ever lost by patient waiting, especially in these matters of the heart."

He kissed her and pressed her to his breast. Without a word beyond the utterance of a heavy sigh, that nearly shaped itself in articulate regret, he shuffled across the room. He took up his gun, unlocked the cellar-door, and disappeared through the dark entrance, a lighted candle in his hand, bolting the door after him. The girl, with a tinge of sadness in her smile, put the letter into her bosom with a soft kiss, and with her face clasped in her hands sat gazing into the fire, flickering now as unsteadily as her hopes, which but a moment since were bright as any flame that had ever darted up this chimney-place. She had come to her father to share her happiness, and he had thrown a shadow over it all. This letter, which to her was the written voice of pure and earnest love, her father had read without a word of praise for him who had penned it. Nor was this all. She saw with deeper pain that he did not believe in her lover. He thought him fickle and false, and his affection for her something that would slowly fade away in his heart, while it grew brighter and stronger in her own. Could this be so? She asked the question with a hesitancy of fear that made her cheeks grow pale and her lips tremble as they gave whispered voice to the words. Only for an instant was there doubt. Hope, that ever faithful ally of Love, came to the rescue of her wavering thoughts, and made them strong again in faith. *He* forget her—cease to love her? No, no! She

could not, would not, believe it. *He*, so good and noble and true, prove false? *His* love like that of other men?

The calm, confident smile that illumined her face gave answer. The faithful love filling her soul poured forth its protest in the resolute pressure of her lips and the steady look of her eyes, as if, though all the world should doubt him, she would never, never think him false.

Meanwhile, Nicholas Grundle busied himself in the cellar, working with quiet, stealthy movements. He had pulled the box away from the wall and removed the stone. From the cavity behind it he had taken several small thick bags securely tied, which he placed in a little pile upon the floor. He seated himself upon a small box, the candle on one side, his gun on the other, and began to open each bag and examine its contents. In most of these pouches was gold, in a few silver, and in a single one were notes. It took him a long time to count over his treasure, fingering every piece as he did, and holding on to it with a hesitating motion as he put it out of his sight into the receptacle where it belonged. Two hours thus passed away, yet so pleasant was his occupation that not once did his busy fingers stop, nor the smile on his face relax its intensity of greed and cunning. It was only when he had refilled the pouches, tied them again and put them all into a larger bag that he rested for a moment, holding the sack between his knees and patting it with a gesture of endearment. Rising at last he put this sack into the cavity of the wall, placed the stone in position, pushed the box into its place, and laid the straws upon its edges. This done, he listened intently for a moment, then ascended the stairs, and locking the cellar-door put the key into his pocket.

Seating himself at the table for dinner, which had been ready for him a long while, he ate his meal in unusual silence, saying little beyond muttering at the rain, which was beating steadily against the windows, with the promise of a long storm in the heavy, leaden sky. Emily endeavored to rouse his spirits, for she readily imagined that she was the cause of his depression. Try as she would—and it was so easy now for her to be happy, with her heart so full of hope and love—he only returned the shortest

answers to her, and finally left the table. Seating himself by the window which commanded a view of the village road, he told her not to disturb him. Leaning forward close to the dripping pane, he gazed steadily down the distant road, which was now and then lost to his vision in the mist of the storm. Two hours thus passed, then three and four; still the one he was looking for did not come. Yet all this while he did not once leave his seat by the window or speak to the girl, who sat knitting by the fireplace, her happy face reflecting the sweet and tender musings of her heart. When at length the little clock had struck five, and the road had grown less and less defined in the waning daylight, Nicholas Grundle rose reluctantly from his seat. He began to close the shutters, bowing his head to the storm with muttered imprecations that made Emily tremble as she ran to his aid.

"Were you expecting that man, father?" she asked when the last shutter had been secured and he stood shaking the rain from the sleeves of his coat into the fire. "I am sorry you are disappointed," pushing back the wet locks from his forehead. "But it may clear off by night. Perhaps he will come then."

"You need not set the table," he said as she turned away from him, standing there in long silence, his hands folded in front of him and his eyes moodily fixed on the fire. "I want no supper. You can eat a bowl of bread and milk in the pantry yonder. Make haste; for if he should come, you must be ready to go to your room. Your face is not for him to look at. 'Twere best hidden in your pillow if he be here."

Shaking his head with little vehement nods, he fixed himself in the old arm-chair where his eyes, should he raise them, would fall upon the valise, the cellar and the outer door. It was no casual gaze he bent, in slow succession, upon each of these objects. There was a varying expression in his countenance, yet it lost none of its intensity of cunning or hope or fear or disappointment as he looked from one to the other, turning uneasily in his seat at times, and listening alertly for some other sound than that of the tumult of the storm. Never once did he speak to the girl, who long since had crept to his side with her stool,

and sat quietly working with the flying needles that kept rhythm with the swift current of her happy thoughts. Her tranquil face was in strong contrast to the one above it, that alternated between impatient frowns and the deeper shadows of disappointment. Her lips seemed to shape themselves in words of tenderness. His never moved, save now and then to give forth a slowly-muttered exclamation of disgust as the storm beat with greater force against the cottage, making it tremble and shake as if the wind were seeking its weakest place to hurl it down. The time passed in silence between these two. It went fast to her, so full of endless visions of joy in the future. Slowly to him the moments drew themselves along, when he had so much to gain, so much to lose.

The clock struck eight. The sound of its little bell was scarcely audible above the roar of the wind and the beating torrent of rain, more furious now, for the tempest had this night summoned to its aid all the powers of the air and sky, making the earth tremble and cower beneath its mighty tread. Suddenly there came a furious blast that made the cottage rock as if in the throes of an earthquake. Another instant, and something fell with a crash upon the roof. With a cry of terror the girl dropped her knitting and clung to her father, her white lips speechless with fear, but he sat unmoved and calm.

"It is only the chimney," he said with a grim smile as the bricks came rattling down upon the ground under the nearest window. "Let the wind blow it over. It makes no difference to me. Somebody besides myself will have to put that chimney up again. But it is a good omen for us, my child," giving her a reassuring pat upon the head. "Why? do you ask. I'll tell you to-morrow—that is, if—"

He did not finish the sentence, for in the lull that had come in the storm Cæsar had heard something without that made him spring from his watch beside the valise to the door, where he stood growling with his nose snuffing along the sill.

"Yes, he is coming," whispered Nicholas Grundle, rising nervously in his chair and bending forward in a listening attitude. "I thought the storm would not keep him away.

Hist! Those are his footsteps. Hurry to your room. To-morrow you shall know all; but, mind me, do not listen to-night." She hesitated to go, catching her father's arm as if she could not leave him. The old look of apprehension had come back to her face, more vivid now as the short, heavy raps sounded upon the door and the man's voice called loudly for admittance.

"Go to your room, I say, and shut the door," he muttered, quickly pushing the girl from him. "Would you spoil all, you silly child?"

She hurried away from him, looking so angrily at her, and fled up the stairs to her own room. Here, closing the door, she stood trembling in the darkness, a fear upon her she could not dispel. Her father might trust this man, but ever since she had caught that first glimpse of his wicked face it had haunted her with a suggestion of evil. What had brought him here to-night in such a storm? Why did he always come in the night? What had he to conceal from the light of day? If she did but dare to listen and hear his errand, she could then tell whether he was deceiving her father, who had put such sudden trust in him. But no; she had promised her father not to listen. She would wait until to-morrow, when he would tell her all and explain the mystery of this man's coming. Meanwhile, the miser had called away the dog and opened the door, admitting the man, who entered drenched with rain, holding a torn and broken umbrella in his hands.

"A very wet night, friend Grundle. Something on the order of a second deluge," he said, tossing the umbrella on the floor by the valise and throwing aside his dripping coat and hat.

"Where is the notary?" asked the other, peering out into the darkness, and then turning to his companion with a look of disappointment.

"Bless your antiquated soul! you don't expect a notary to come out to-night for a dollar, do you? Why, I wouldn't have been here myself, except my way home lay in this direction. I thought it no more than fair, as a matter of business, to stop and tell you that the notary could not come until to-morrow."

"Why not? Isn't my money as good as anybody's?" snarled Grundle, slamming the door and barring it.

"All his time was engaged for to-day. I'll warrant he has been giving some poor client the benefit of the law's delay. But come, friend Grundle, don't look so disappointed. No matter if you do wait until to-morrow for the signing of the deed, you have got the best of a sure bargain."

"In what way, I would like to know?" muttered the old man, following his companion, who had crossed the room and now stood with his back to the fire, his hands behind him and his smiling face bent with a free-and-easy inclination upon the other.

"That I can readily answer. But if you will keep this dog at a respectful distance from my anatomy, I shall be much obliged to you, and be able to talk with much more freedom," said the man, suddenly retreating before the mastiff, who was walking about in front of him showing his teeth and emitting a series of low growls, with a threatening look in his steady eyes.

Nicholas Grundle seized the dog by his stout brass collar and dragged him to the farther corner of the room, fastening him by the collar to an iron chain which was secured to the floor by a staple.

"Much obliged! I feel more comfortable now," resumed the stranger as Cæsar silently stretched himself upon the floor in obedience to his master, and lay with his head between his paws. "I never did fancy strange dogs, and this one of yours seems determined not to be friendly with me."

"You are safe enough from him now," interrupted Grundle; "so go on and tell me how I have got the best of this bargain, and how it is sure, when it cannot be completed before to-morrow."

"Do you see that valise?" replied the man, seating himself by the fireplace and mysteriously nodding in the direction of the valise; then, as Grundle's eyes turned to the object, he added, "That makes your bargain sure."

"In what way?" slowly asked the miser. "It is neither yourself nor the notary."

"Is any one listening?" whispered the man, glancing

nervously around the room. "Your daughter—where is she? Can she hear or see us?"

"She is abed, and was asleep long ago."

"I wish I were sure of that."

"Why? What matters it to you?"

"Because," replied he with a cautious look, "if I thought we were safe from interruption by her, I would show you what I carry in that valise. The sight of its contents would satisfy you that I mean business to-morrow, I know."

"Go on and open it, then. I give you my word she shall neither hear nor see you. I have her promise for that;" and the old man's voice and manner grew suddenly confidential.

"I wish I were only as certain of our secrecy as you are," continued the stranger after a pause, during which he had been listening intently, turning his head in all directions, and finally fixing his gaze upon the little stairway. "Would you object," he went on in a low voice, "to turning the key in her door? These girls are often smart beyond their years. Deception is as natural to them as grace and shyness. I have found in my life that locks and bolts are the only safeguards—and they not always—against a woman's curiosity."

Nicholas Grundle made no reply. He stood irresolute a moment. Then he crept softly up the stairs.

He soon returned, bearing in his hand an old iron key. This he held in front of the man with a cunning smile, and whispered,

"Let her be asleep or awake, she cannot open the door this key has locked." Then, putting it in his pocket, he added, with an impatient shrug of his shoulders at the complacent air with which the other was regarding him, "Come, you have no further excuse now, if you intend to open the valise."

"Sh! sh! friend Grundle! Not so loud. I have known floors to have ears," said the man, stealthily rising from his chair and taking from his pocket a bunch of keys. "I hope I shall have better luck to-night with the locks. Would you mind holding the candle for me?"

They went softly over to the valise, both evidently un-

der great excitement. The keys rattled in the man's hand and his face was rapidly growing pale. The candle trembled so in Grundle's grasp that he clutched it in his two hands, and held it so close to him that his excited breathing almost extinguished it.

"Steady, friend Grundle! Don't be so excited," said his companion, who had thrown aside the carpet and was already kneeling in front of the valise. "Here! Bring the candle lower; I might as well be in the dark, with you standing up there holding the light above your head. Kneel down here beside me, or else give me the candle to manage;" and he put out his hand as if to take it.

Nicholas Grundle was too eager to catch the first glimpse of what was in the valise to need any second command to come nearer. In another instant he had kneeled beside the stranger, and was holding the candle down close to the padlock, which, as before, was offering some impediment to the stranger's key.

"Your hand trembles so that the light is too unsteady for me to see clearly," said the man. "Here! I can do better with it by myself."

He took the candle from the other's hand, and turning his back to him apparently fumbled away in silence upon the lock. Nicholas Grundle was impatient at this delay. He crept closer, and leaned over the other's shoulder to see what he was doing. Certainly the stranger was not trying now to open the valise, for his hands were evidently busy with something hidden beneath his coat. What strange though agreeable odor was this that made the miser recoil? Why did he look with terror-stricken eyes first at his gun and then at the dog, both so far out of his reach? What ailed him now that, paralyzed with fear, he could neither move hand nor foot, only give one feeble cry of—

"Help, Emily! help!"

The other, quick as a flash, had put the candle on the floor. Then he turned as suddenly upon the miser, and with a low, devilish laugh caught him around the neck. Stifling into a deathly gurgle his victim's cry for help, he covered his nose and mouth with a thick white cloth and

pressed him, resisting less and less, slowly back upon the floor.

The girl in the room above had heard this cry for help. Single and hoarse and faint though it was, it had fallen upon her ears with a power as startling as if it had been uttered beside the bed, whereon she had but a moment before laid herself, cowering with a fear of evil that made every sense alert with alarm.

She leaped to her feet and sprang to the door, her movements as swift as the suspicion of villainy that flashed through her mind. Her father crying for help! Was the man murdering him? Awful suggestion—one to make the stoutest heart quail! But it made her frame vibrate with strength and thrilled her with a courage so resolute that all fear for herself was lost in her determination to go to her father's rescue, though she should go to her own death besides. With desperate energy she seized the latch and pulled against the door, for the fierce barking of the dog and the muttering angry voice of the man warned her that a deadly struggle was going on, in which a moment more her aid might be too late. The door would not open; it was locked. With a cry of dismay, which might well have served for the echo of the one the old man had so recently made, she remembered that her father had locked this door a little while ago, whispering to her that he would soon come back and open it again. Locked in here, and all access to her dying father cut off by his own act! In an agony of despair she beat upon the door and pressed against it with all her power, which she felt certain would soon bear it from its hinges. But the door stood firm—mockingly, remorselessly firm.

What should she do? She wrung her hands an instant, then suddenly clasped them with a hysterical laugh. Running to the window, she threw it open. Here was a way for her. From this sill she could lower herself to the ground by the stout grape-vine that crept along the side of the house, and enter the cottage through some window below. Quickly springing upon the window-ledge, she grasped the vine in her hands and swung herself out into the darkness and the storm. For a second she hung motionless, the rain beating down upon her up-

turned face, over which the wind blew her thick hair, shutting out the sight of the light in her room. Then, as her feet caught a hold in the meshes of the vine, which stoutly bore her up, she began her descent. Quickly she lowered herself now, for there was a sudden silence within the cottage that made her quake with the apprehension that she was already too late to aid her father in his struggle for life. As she touched the ground, almost breathless with her exertion and agonized by the fear that her father was dead, there came the sound of carriage-wheels close at hand. She stood bewildered with the sudden hope this sound had brought her. Here at last was help when most she needed it. Above the roar of the wind she heard the voice of the driver as he urged on his horse. In the direction of this voice she ran, crying, "Stop! stop! Help! help!" Another instant and the vehicle dashed past the cottage, rattling along the road toward the village, the man within calling to his steed in tones as frightened as those which bore the girl's cry for help above the howling of the storm. But though the carriage sped away as if followed by some demon of the darkness, the girl did not cease her cries nor abate the swift-flying pace with which she pursued it. Already she was in the road, running after the vehicle, calling louder and more piteously to it the farther it left her behind. She stopped an instant for breath, and clasped her giddy head to keep herself from falling. She glanced back at the cottage. She saw the door open, and in it stood that dreaded man, his form outlined in the light of the room behind him. The sight of him sent a thrill of terror through her and quickly brought back her strength and resolution. Her father in the power of such a wicked, cruel man and she standing here! She ran on again after the carriage. It should not escape her. The man within it should yet hear her cries and turn to her relief. Away she flew, faster even than before, calling so loudly that the wind, roar as it might, could not drown her voice. But as she ran, and was now gaining upon the carriage, her feet dashed against some object in the road. She fell headlong, and in another instant lay senseless upon the earth.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONFIDENCES AND COURTSHIPS.

“**Y**OU are very kind to speak so hopefully,” said the elder woman with a voice as sad as the dejected air with which she sat looking into the bright, crackling fire that burned this evening in the old farm-house. “But what reason for hope is there with so much arrayed against us? What can we two weak women do to successfully oppose the schemes of these cunning and wicked men? All is on their side—money, experience and the world’s opinion. You seem to forget, Aziel, that we are only women; and as if that were not disadvantage enough in this contest, we are both friendless and penniless.”

“We have our courage and our wits still left. These should make us strong and hopeful,” replied the other with a firm voice, not looking up from beside the chimney-jamb, where, as usual, she was sitting in the shadow, her face bent over the swiftly-plying needles. “True, we are only women, as you say, our very weakness giving men their power to deal with us; true it is they can rob us of love, virtue, happiness, friends and all our hearts hold dear and sacred; but, thank Heaven! no man, however strong or wicked he may be, can take away from woman her fortitude to endure calamity, or crush out of her heart the hope that lingers there despite its deepest sorrows and unutterable woe. But it has not come to this pass with us. We have ample time to put our courage and tact to the test in this affair, which, I promise you, if we are but bold and clever, shall not go so hard with us as you fear. As I told you to-day, we have already that young Dibbs and Patriek on our side, and I will see to it that the lawyer too joins our forces.”

“You are a very courageous little woman,” said the other, after a pause, in which she had been regarding her companion with a smile of admiration. “I never thought you had so stout a heart. You have always seemed to me, in all these years we have been together, so timid and fearful, going around as if you were almost afraid of your own

shadow. I cannot understand what has made such a sudden change in you. Somehow, since *he* came back, we have changed characters, as it were. I have become weak, and you strong; I despairing, and you hopeful."

"Perhaps it is because I have less at stake than you have. You know it is easy for one to hope who has not much to fear. I know you will believe me when I tell you that I feel any harm that threatens you or Volney as much as if it threatened myself."

"It's always Volney when you speak of me;" and there was a trifle of bitterness in the woman's tone. "You link his fortune closely with mine, as if you thought my chief duty in life were to him—that I must do everything with a view to his happiness. For his sake you persuaded me to endure in silence the many tormenting years of my first married life; for his sake you urged me to marry this man, who has heaped upon me every indignity these past five wretched years; and for his sake I dare say you would now, were you to speak out your honest thoughts, urge me to sacrifice myself in any way for the balance of my days."

"You have always done your fullest duty by him," said the other, softly. "No mother ever did more for a child. I am sure the day will come when he will repay it. Not all, for that he can never do, strive as he may. A mother's love is a debt that can never be cancelled this side of heaven;" and the tremulous voice died away in the silence.

"He owes far more to you than he does to me," was the slow and emphatic rejoinder. "You have been more of a mother to him than I have been. Your breast fed him when he was a babe. By day and by night you were never away from him. His first crow was to you—his first laugh in your arms. In every sickness you were his constant nurse—in every hour of health his playmate and companion. You have lived only for him since the very night he was born. How strange it is that I, his own mother, could not love him as you have done! Perhaps," she added with a little shudder and in a lower voice, "it is because I ceased to love his father ere he was born. I have heard of mothers who never loved their offspring when thus born, nor their offspring them. Maybe such a mother I am."

At this moment the outer door of the kitchen was

opened and closed again. As the women listened a pair of heavy boots was heard beating time to the following verse, rendered with a rollicking air by a light-hearted though subdued voice :

“Och, Mary O’Hara, you use me vilely,
And like a child me do coax and decoy.
It’s meself that’s thinkin’, while you do be winkin’
So soft upon me, you will my heart desthroy.”

Hardly had the last word been uttered, when the singer rapped gently on the door, and opened it slowly in response to the answering voice. It was Pat Doyle who sidled into the room with an awkward bow. He stood in the presence of the women twirling his hat in his hand, and his eyes rose and fell upon the floor with an abashed expression. But there was a sly look of merriment in them as they were slowly raised, and he glanced from one woman to the other as he said,

“Shure, it’s knowin’ the answer I’ll get afore I axes the question, seein’ the kind heart o’ ye lookin’ out o’ them eyes, Misthress Gagger. God save ye kindly, ma’am !”

“What is it you wish, Patrick ?” she asked, greeting him with a half-serious look and a little authoritative wave of her hand.

“I’d be afther goin’ out to spind the evenin’, if it’s not agin yer likin’, ma’am ;” and although he had tried to answer her with seeming indifference, his face flushed and his eyes became suddenly busy in watching the nervous movements of his feet.

“I have no objection to your going, execept my regard for your health. It’s a very bad night for any one, even as hardy as you are, to be exposed. Certainly you do not know how heavily it is raining ; you will be drenched through and through. See ! you are very wet now, coming only this little distance from the barn.”

“Shure, it’s more harrum can befall a man than the thrifle o’ a duckin’, Misthress Gagger, an it’s not meself as wud be afear’d o’ a deluge this night. It’s runnin’ between the dhrops I’d be all the way ;” and he said this with a sparkle in his eyes and a smile on his lips.

“Very well ; go, if you choose. But you must be

greatly in love," she added with a quizzical look and a little banter in her voice, "to go two miles through such a pouring rain as this to see your charmer. I hope the young lady will appreciate your extraordinary devotion."

"It's no more for her than for meself I'm goin'," he rejoined with a sly laugh. "Faix, it's up to the ears I am wid love o' her, an' it's proud I am to tell it," with an emphatic shake of his head.

"Are you very sure you love her? Do you feel happy, without a single doubt, when you are with her?"

"Oh, Misthress Gagger, ye make me blush, so ye do, till ivery dthrop o' blood in me body is scaldin' me cheeks! It's not ashamed I am to tell ye how I love the pretty colleen. Faix, when I'm sittin' all alone wid her, I feel as if I wor covered all over wid rainbows an' aolian harps wor playin' all round me. Ah! shure, it's an angel she is, barrin' the wings!"

"You must be very happy with such feelings," went on Mrs. Gagger when the merriment his speech had excited in her and Aziel had subsided. "Love does not always bring pleasure to its possessor. It makes some people very miserable."

"Does it, indade?" opening his eyes wide with an incredulous look. Then, emboldened by the interest his listeners were manifesting, the merry twinkle came back, and he continued: "Shure, then, it can't be rale love that worries them. Is it love that's miserable, do ye tell me? Faix, it's a great sweetness for me to be dyin' o' sich misery as love. It sets me heart to achin' so wid joy it's not a wink o' sleep I git at night for the pleasure o' the pain."

"I wonder if she loves you as much? I hope so, though the song I heard a few moments ago did not show that you were very confident of her affection."

"Now, Misthress Gagger, wor ye listenin' to that bit o' fun I wor pokin' at meself? Indade, it wor only a thrifle o' humor, so it wor. Throth, if I wor as shure o' heaven as I am of her heart, it's not throublin' me sowl I'd be about a sweet harp an' goolden crown in the world beyant," reverently crossing himself as he cast his eyes upward.

"Has she ever told you she loved you? If not, you had better take care," shaking her finger at him with a warning in her look. "Sometimes love is all on one side, and the party loving does not find out his mistake until it is too late."

This remark at first had a depressing effect upon Doyle. His eyes became serious and his smiles gave way to doubts as he ran his hand slowly through his hair. But only for an instant was his expression thus confused and uncertain. His face cleared away as quickly as it had clouded, and he said with a confident laugh,

"Indade, it's only tryin' me faith in the colleen ye are, Misthress Gagger. Be me sowl, it's me book-oath I could take that she loves me! Av coorse it's not all her heart she'd be showin' me at wanse. It's playin' a while wid me tindherness she'd be afther doin' wid the little scrap of decipshun in her nathur. Take my word for it, it's not whistlin' to a milestone I've bin doin', at all, at all, these last tin months, Misthress Gagger."

The comical wink with which Doyle delivered this remark made his companions break out into a hearty laugh, in which he joined with quiet satisfaction.

"I see you are hopelessly in love, so hurry away and join your idol as soon as you can," said his mistress with a dismissing wave of her hand. "Take my advice, Patrick, and make sure that she loves you before you give her more of your heart."

"Shure, it's ivery small dhrop o' me own heart she has now, the little desaiver! It's her blessed heart, mavourneen, I'm afther wantin' wid all me powers."

He quickly bowed himself out with scraping feet, and left the room. A moment later they heard him going down the lane singing this song, a line of which they caught now and then in the lull of the storm:

"Then Rory, the rogue, stole his arm round her neck,
So soft and so white, without freckle or speck;
And he looked in her eyes, that were beaming with light,
And he kissed her sweet lips. Don't you think he was right?
'Now, Rory, leave off, sir! You'll hug me no more.
That's eight times to-day you have kissed me before.'
'Then here goes another,' says he, 'to make sure,
For there's luck in odd numbers, says Rory O'More.'"

"He's a good, honest soul," said Mrs. Gagger when Doyle's voice was no longer heard, "I could not bear to refuse to let him go, but I wish now that I had not consented. Somehow, I do dread our being left alone, even on such a night as this."

"I am sure we need fear no visitors to-night. This storm, I guess, will be our safe protection from visits of good or evil," replied Aziel in a reassuring tone. "Yet if the one you dread should come, he shall not make a coward of either of us. We can bravely dare any one and anything to-night;" and her face was not less resolute than her words.

CHAPTER XXX.

WHAT MAY HAPPEN TO A LOVER.

PATRICK DOYLE had been gone but a short time when the sound of carriage-wheels coming rapidly up the lane startled the women.

"Who can it be?" exclaimed Mrs. Gagger in a half-suppressed whisper that told as plainly as the agitation of her countenance the fear that had suddenly come upon her.

Aziel made no reply beyond a negative shake of the head. Her knitting fell into her lap, and she leaned forward, intently listening, a white rift crossing the firm lines of her face. The vehicle drew nearer, halted an instant at the door, then went on at a slow pace in the direction of the barn. There it stopped, and a man's voice called out with a pleasant gruffness,

"Hello, Pat! Here! I want you!"

No response coming to this summons, they heard the barn-door opened and the vehicle driven under shelter.

"It's only the lawyer, Mr. Craft," said Aziel with a smile of relief in reply to the questioning and frightened gaze of her companion. "Certainly," with a meaning inflection in her voice, "you, at least, have no cause for alarm in seeing him."

"What can bring him here in such a storm? No good to us, I am sure." Then, her countenance quickly changing with the thought, "Ah! I remember now—the letter he wrote to you. But, Aziel, I would not trust that man. Be careful how you trifle with him. You may not be able to deceive him so easily as you suppose."

"I think I understand him," said Aziel, a little gleam of merriment in her eyes. "He comes here to-night as our friend, and I shall see to it that he goes away the same. You must promise not to leave me alone with him a moment. You will do that much to help along my scheme? You will further aid my plan by treating him with apparent kindness while he is here, and by keeping him engaged in conversation with you as much as you possibly can."

Hardly had an affirmative answer been given to these requests when a rap came upon the door. With a cautious shake of her finger at her mistress, and suppressing her own mischievous smile, Aziel opened the door.

"Good-evening, Miss Loyd! I have the extreme honor of personally presenting myself to you—Rader Craft, attorney and counselor-at-law," was the lawyer's salutation as he removed his hat and gave her a full view of his expansive smile, which, rippling on his broad features, finally lost itself in the shining waste of his upper forehead.

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance," rejoined Aziel with a modest inclination of her head as she extended her hand and bid him enter.

He eagerly took her palm in the great puffy cavity of his own, and closed his fat fingers upon it with a pressure more ardent than agreeable to her as she gently released herself.

"Your cordial welcome, let me hope," he said with an impressive voice and his most benignant look, "is the initiatory perfection of this evening's hospitality.—Ah!" noticing Mrs. Gagger, who had risen to receive him, for the first time. "This, I presume, is the wife of our highly-esteemed, though slightly eccentric, fellow-citizen, Silas Gagger, Esq.? Mrs. Gagger," advancing and making her as profound a bow as the rotundity of his form

would permit, "allow me to express the unalloyed felicity with which I present myself to so estimable a lady."

In response to Aziel's urgent look she returned this compliment with a gracious smile. Assuring him that the pleasure of their meeting was mutual, she invited him to lay aside his overcoat and be seated in the chair which Aziel had already placed beside him.

"The cordiality of your reception, my dear madam," he said as he deliberately drew off the coat and placed it over the back of the chair, seating himself with a grand flourish of his hands, "I hope is the earnest of our mutual appreciation. For allow me to state, *ab initio*—from the beginning, as we gentlemen of the bar use the phrase—that the object of my appearance on this inclement evening is not only to assure you of my distinguished consideration, but to convince you if possible that, while my professional services are not directly at your disposal, you can, nevertheless, have the unreserved benefit of my friendly counsel and sympathetic anxiety under the present harassing circumstances of your environments."

Having thus delivered himself with a voice as bland as his smile, and with his hands slowly revolving around each other, as if he ever held them thus ready to do any act of kindness, he raised his inclining head to an erect position, and with a smiling serenity awaited her reply. While thus regarding her his eyes more than once furtively glanced at Aziel, who, already in her seat by the chimney-jamb, was busy with her eyes upon her rapid needles.

"I don't exactly catch your meaning," answered Mrs. Gagger with assumed embarrassment. "Perhaps you will be kind enough to explain to me more fully in what way I can avail myself of your friendly aid, so very kindly proffered."

"Primarily, my dear madam, allow me to propound an interrogatory. Am I correct in the assumption that, with your perfect acquiescence, I can communicate with you in absolute freedom and confidence on an important subject touching your interests in the presence of our mutual friend?" inclining his head toward Aziel with an exuberant smile, over which there came a shade of disappoint-

ment when he saw how steadily her eyes were fixed upon her work. "A beautiful exhibition of maidenly reserve!" he mentally thought as his gaze slowly reverted to his immediate listener.

"Aziel and I keep no secrets from each other. We have been confidential friends during many years. I shall be pleased to have her hear anything regarding any interest of mine, no matter how private you may consider it."

"A most generous compliment, and well deserved, I am confident," ejaculated the lawyer, again looking vainly in Aziel's direction with his beaming smile, and as vainly adding a slight nervous cough to attract her attention.

"Friendship, Mrs. Gagger," he resumed, "is a cadence of heavenly melody ever resounding through noble hearts. It is the one divine song of our fallen nature. Gratified indeed am I to discover so celestial a bond of union between you two lovely women as friendship; which, as the immortal Cicero says, improves happiness and abates misery by the doubling of our joy and the dividing of our grief. The more encouraged am I now to believe that the object of my present visitation will eventuate successfully. Two heroic women, their hearts united by friendship's holy bond, can defy alike the insidious approach of evil and the more open assaults of avowed hostility. But why should I longer delay to appease your anxious curiosity? Nor will I. Ladies," lowering his voice to a theatrical whisper which sounded like the bass-notes of a violoncello, "my appearance beneath this hospitable roof is both a warning of danger and a suggestion of its avoidance."

"Indeed!" exclaimed both women in the same breath, their countenances well simulating an agitation that made him put out his hands with a repressing and consoling gesture.

"Nay, nay!" he said with a gentle chiding in his smooth voice; "let not needless fear thus usurp the empire of your cheeks or banish from carmine lip and gleaming eye the heart's serenest smile. There is no immediate cause, even in the present threatening circumstances, for alarm's slightest shudder. I grant there are darkling clouds athwart the domestic sky, obscuring the solar luminary and portending the gathering of a storm, but notwithstanding

these portents the uxorial mariner," fixing his calm, confident gaze on Mrs. Gagger, "shall cross the threatening seas to a smoothly-undulating harbor of safety and of rest."

"Your words are very encouraging," replied Mrs. Gagger, drawing a deep sigh and letting her clasped hands fall into her lap, while her great black eyes looked into his face with a timid expression of gratitude.

"We shall never forget your kindness," interposed Aziel with a tremulous voice, vouchsafing him the briefest glance of her upturned, thankful face.

"Ladies," laying his hand upon his heart and bowing gallantly to each of them in turn, "your compliments overwhelm me. Would I were more worthy of your distinguished consideration. But why should I delay to communicate the important business which is the object of our present interview? Nor will I. Mrs. Gagger," a touch of gravity obscuring for the instant the complete blandness of his smile, "I shall not be violating the ethics of my profession when I inform you that before your husband's departure he held a personal interview with me. In justice to the confidence he then and there reposed in me, I cannot divulge the questions he submitted for my legal elucidation. This much I will say for your gratification—that his absence will be but temporary, and I cherish the hope that during his self-imposed social exile nothing can transpire in this locality to confirm the unfounded suspicions of his peculiar nature—a nature, allow me to add, so jealous of your transcendent beauty and virtue that it excites my admiration as well as my sympathy."

She sadly shook her head as she rejoined: "I am at an utter loss to understand your meaning, Mr. Craft. Your words are as unintelligible to me as my husband's conduct."

"Of whom is Mr. Gagger jealous?" asked Aziel, turning upon him a look of modest innocence.

"Ladies," resumed the lawyer after quite a pause—and there was a touch of offended dignity in his voice—"I appear here neither to reveal nor to explore secrets. Professional ethics forbid the one, and friendship the other. My mission to-night is merely to assure you that my pro-

fessional duty to Mr. Gagger shall in no wise interfere with my friendly offices to Mrs. Gagger. In this case the cause of husband and that of wife are so identical that I cannot further the interests of the one without aiding those of the other. Already I have been commissioned by Mr. Gagger to respond to any monetary demands his wife may make upon me during his absence, and these demands I shall be pleased to liquidate at any time, either by letter or in person."

"Thank you! Just at present I am in no need of money," said Mrs. Gagger with a haughty little inclination of her head. "You can keep my husband's funds untouched by me until his return."

"Ah! they were merely placed at your disposal in case of necessity," rejoined the lawyer in a mollified tone.

"What would you advise us to do to allay Mr. Gagger's jealousy?" questioned Aziel, drawing her seat a little nearer the lawyer, her eyes innocently scanning his face.

"My friendly advice, ladies, is that during his absence you shall allow no stranger to visit this house, no matter who he may be or what his pretext for coming. And," he went on with a knowing shake of his head, "should you be annoyed by any stranger—mark me, I make no insinuation—refer him to *me* without delay. Even if Mr. Gagger's suspicions of identity be correct"—here he half closed his eyes and brought together with little taps the open fingers of his hands—"that is no reason why the hymeneal altar of five years ago should lose any of its glory or its binding power."

"And you will aid us in bringing about so happy a result from all this trouble?" queried Aziel, clasping her hands with a pleading gesture and looking at him with her most winning smile.

"My chivalric nature responds with all its heart to your request, Miss Loyd. You and Mrs. Gagger here shall yet learn how one true friend can nobly serve the object of his attraction;" and he ogled her, with his lips expanded like the new moon's crescent smile.

Some noise without had suddenly caught Mrs. Gagger's attention. She went over to the window to listen, her

back turned toward her companions. Thus left comparatively alone with Aziel, the lawyer lost no time in seizing his opportunity; and opportunity was the one great want of his overburdened heart this evening. He glanced down on the woman at his side with an eager, passionate smile. He caught at her hand and squeezed it violently, his face radiant with smirks and smiles, while with his disengaged hand he quickly brought out from his pocket a little bunch of red roses—Mrs. Boozer's flowers—and pressed them into her palm, excitedly whispering,

"They will speak to you far better than I can. There's a love-message in them. Let them tell it to your heart when I am gone."

He tried to kiss her hand. She resisted, pulling it from his hold and turning away her face with a smothered laugh. Excited by this sweet exhibition of her coyness, he made a desperate lunge to regain his grasp of the hand so tantalizingly near; but as he did so the treacherous chair, without so much as a creak of warning, broke beneath him, and the next moment he was struggling upon the floor, his hands and heels flourishing in the air.

"Oh, Mr. Craft, are you hurt?" screamed Aziel, bending over him as, after several spasmodic struggles, he lay motionless, like a great turtle upon its back.

"Oh, I hope you are not injured!" exclaimed Mrs. Gagger, coming to the rescue with an exaggerated cry of alarm.

Now, while the personal beauty or attractive appearance of a turtle suffers no material diminution by his dying upon his back, this attitude of the lawyer severely detracted from his manly appearance and dignified bearing. The harder he strove to regain his feet, the more ludicrous a sight he became. His face grew redder and redder, until it looked like the prize beet at an agricultural show. His fat, short arms stubbornly resisted his frantic efforts to get them under him, while his ponderous legs as stubbornly refused to crook themselves beneath him. All this time the broken pieces of the chair were impinging themselves against his anatomy, giving a pain that added a con-

strained expression of agony to the confusion of his countenance.

There was but one way for him to get up—to roll over and elevate himself by his hands and knees. Modesty and pride alike forbade such an exhibition of his form and lack of suppleness. No; sooner than do that he would ask these ladies to extend their hands and pull him upon his feet. He did so.

“Ladies,” he exclaimed in hoarse puffs as he renewed his exertions, “please give me your hands. A strange weakness has come over my bodily powers. I require your assistance.”

With increased exclamations of sympathy, each seized one of his hands, and at his signal pulled upward with all the might of their outstretched arms. Slowly his large body had begun to rise, and with a mighty effort he had brought one foot beneath his centre of gravity, when—intentionally or not we cannot say, for history is seldom exact—the women lost their hold, and down he went upon the floor again with a tremendous thud. The women gave little screams of alarm, and recriminating each other for their want of strength bent over him with profuse apologies and ardent proffers of another attempt to aid him. He shook his head in despair, and looked up at them with a face of wild dismay. Then, with something very like a groan, he turned over, and with one mighty scramble, as if he were swimming in a shallow pond, at last got upon his hands and knees. From this posture he quickly rose to his feet, and glancing in mute confusion at their restrained faces caught up his hat and coat and darted toward the door.

“Excuse me, ladies!” he managed to gasp. “I have an engagement. Why need I longer delay? Nor will I.”

Another second and he was gone. In the midst of their half-subdued peals of laughter they heard him swing open the barn-door with a mighty bang. An instant later his carriage dashed furiously by the house, and sped down the lane at a rattling rate. The women tried to compose themselves and discuss the object of the attorney’s visit and its effect upon their future. They could not long be serious with the picture of the lawyer on the floor so vivid in

their minds. Yielding themselves fully to this cause of merriment, they laughed until their streaming eyes and aching sides finally brought the quiet of exhaustion.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHAT PAT DOYLE BROUGHT HOME.

IT was nearly ten o'clock. Her mistress had retired to her room for the night, and Aziel Loyd was sitting alone, waiting for the return of Doyle, who was already absent far beyond his allotted time. It was neither his delay nor any fear for his safety that busied Aziel's mind as she sat with folded hands looking so thoughtfully into the fire dying out with a farewell feeble glow upon the hearth. There was much for this woman to think of with fear and trembling as the events of the past few days crowded upon her for consideration, threatening her with any other result than that which it was her anxious desire to accomplish. She had thus far planned well, she believed, but how easy it was for all her precautions and schemes to be brought to naught by circumstances beyond her control! There was so much to be guarded against that could happen, after all, despite the sleepless vigilance with which she was endeavoring to avert the evil that menaced not only those she loved, but herself as well as them—ay, even more, perhaps. The evil that hung over herself! What made this thought suddenly blanch her cheek and bring into her face that look of dread which, stronger or fainter, was ever upon it when she was alone? Why, at the suggestion of this personal danger, had she lost her resolute bearing and clasped her hands with a gesture of alarm, and glanced so quickly behind her, as if she were fearing some apparition standing at yonder outer door? Why did she listen so intently, her eyes restless with an apprehension that made her whole frame shudder as if she were hearing some foreboding voice in the wind's low moan or a stealthy footfall walking beneath the window. No, she must be mistaken. Those were

sounds of neither voice nor footsteps. It must have been only the wind she heard sighing through the great elm that overspread the house, or beating with more fitful gusts upon the lilac-bushes that stood beside the door.

Sighing now more plaintively than the wind had ever done, she turned again toward the fire. Her face, weary and sad, fell upon her bosom. Too well she knew that it was in her own heart, so tremulous with the secrets of the past, she heard this voice and this footstep. They were always the accompaniments of her nightly dreams and daily solitudes. But was she ever to be thus in dread of them, foreshadowing as they did his image by day and by night? Or would they again be a signal to her, as of old, of joy and of peace? Would he some day be as when she had first known him? She stopped short here, checking these thoughts with a white, scared look, such as would have come to her face if she had suddenly found herself standing on the brink of some yawning precipice. With the trifle of a shudder, she slowly drew her hand across her brow. There was forced to her countenance a vacant stare, as if she were making a violent effort to forget herself for a moment—as if she were striving to banish then and for ever these thoughts which had sounded such a dangerous alarm in her quickly-responding conscience. The struggle was short and decisive. For an instant a look of quivering pain shot across her pallid features. She put out her hands gropingly, as if she were fain to let go the dearest, most cherished wish of her heart. Then came a smothered cry of anguish, such as he who sinks to death beneath the black waves of the starless sea might utter. Her head fell forward into the clasp of her cold, rigid hands as she murmured wailingly, though with a tremulous firmness that told of victory,

“Good-bye for ever, Seth! God helping me, good-bye for ever!”

The night-wind bore this last relinquished hope of a woman's broken heart onward through the storm, higher up through the black clouds, far beyond the motionless ether, and laid it at the gate of heaven. And He who watched there took it up with happy face and placed it in his bosom, as if it were a priceless gem cast that way by

one of the radiant figures who stood upon the shining battlements above him. Down to earth again swept the wind with a roar, rushing over hill and plain, bending beneath its strong embrace the giants of the forest and hurling before it with maddened shriek the branches of trees that would not yield it homage. At last, with a hollow moan, it rested for a moment in the farm-house elm, and then, with a broken sigh, kissed the lilac-bushes and went on in silence through the darkness, leaving the woman no sound to listen to save the ceaseless pour of the rain, that came with no steadier flow than did her own sad tears.

So absorbed was Aziel in thus giving vent to her sorrow and finding a dim pleasure even in these tears—for they relieved a grief she could find no expression for in words—that she did not hear a heavy, uncertain step as it trudged up the graveled walk. Nor did she catch the muffled voice of a man, speaking now in soothing tones, and now in louder exclamations of distress. It was only when the wavering stride had stumbled upon the doorstep, as if bending beneath some burden, and the door itself had been suddenly flung wide open, that she sprang from her chair with a cry of alarm. A short, stifled cry it was, that instantly died away in silence as she saw Doyle, with pale face and staring eyes, standing before her with the motionless and drenched figure of a woman clasped in his arms.

"Whisht, wisht!" he said, shaking his head in token of silence, and with as reassuring a look as his agitation could command, as Aziel came quickly toward him with a face as pale and affrighted as his own. "It's not a sperrit I am, Misthress Loyd. Don't be so freckened. It's me livin' self that's howldin' in me arms the poor colleen of the miser's hut beyant, lyin' murdered in the road. Oh, wirra, wirra! Here she is, the dear crather, pale and bleedin' and cold. May the divil fly away wid the vagabond that struck her the blow!"

"Murdered!" gasped Aziel with a shudder, laying her trembling hand upon the wet head that rested so motionless upon his shoulder, and gently turning the face to view—Emily's face, down one side of which trickled a flow of

blood, appearing all the more crimson by contrast with the death-like paleness that overspread every feature.

"Yes, murdered she was intirely," assured Pat in a hoarse whisper as, in response to a silent gesture from the woman, he carried the insensible maiden over to the lounge and laid her reverently down upon it, "though it's brathin' a partin' thrifle o' air she is now. Shure," he added, crossing himself and with a deep solemnity in his voice as a gurgling sigh issued from the ashen lips of the girl, "that the last good-bye to 'arth her sowl be's givin'—"

"Hurry! Fetch me some cold water," interrupted Aziel, who was already kneeling beside Emily and loosening the folds of the sufferer's dress, to aid the fluttering respiration she had felt as she touched the silent lips with a tender kiss. Meanwhile, Aziel had gently taken Emily's head on her arm and pushed back from her forehead the dark and clotted hair that streamed over it. Thus disclosing the wound, she saw, with a relief which gave voice to itself in a suppressed exclamation of joy, that it was only a long, jagged flesh-cut over the temple, and that already the flow of blood was ceasing.

"Here's the wather, Misthress Loyd," whispered Pat, striding on tip toe to her side, "an' ivery dhrop o' it is a blissed prayer from meself fur the dyin' sowl o' her."

Aziel began to gently sprinkle the upturned, quiet face, which as yet gave no signs of consciousness, though the cool drops fell all over it. With a more copious hand she repeated the experiment, speaking softly in the girl's ear and calling her by name.

"It's fur iver thim lips is closed," murmured Pat, intently watching the effect of the water, and holding the pail at arm's length in his two hands. "Shure, it was God's own callin' voice she answered wid thim purty lips in the road beyant a while ago whin the murdherin' villain sthruck her the blow o' death. The devil sweep him off the earth and into the depths below!"

It was some time before Aziel's efforts were rewarded with any success, even ever so trifling. At last, however, a little convulsive shudder passed over the slight figure of the sleeper; there was a faint twitching at her lips; her

head stirred with a feeble, uneasy motion, and her quivering eyelids finally opened themselves, disclosing for an instant a vague, wandering look, which was as soon shut out again by the sudden falling of the lids.

"Did ye mind the awful sthare o' her, Misthress Loyd?" said Pat in a hoarse, frightened tone, suddenly setting the pail upon the floor and withdrawing a few steps with an expression of horror upon his face. "Shure, it's thriflin' wid God's own will ye are, tryin' to bring back her spirit, Misthress Loyd, whin this blessed minit it's on its way to the holy heavens;" and rapidly crossing himself, he gazed steadily upward, as if he were indeed beholding the flight of her soul to the spirit-land.

Again the drooping lids of the girl quivered; this time opening themselves slowly and widely with less spasmodic action, and disclosing a struggling look of returning intelligence. But as soon as her eyes caught a glimpse of Aziel's overhanging face, the girl's body gave a startled motion and her lips suddenly parted, as if she would give vent to a scream; but exhaustion only gave expression to her alarm in a deep-drawn sigh as she again closed her eyes and a perceptible tremor ran over her frame.

"Shure, Misthress Loyd, it's a moighty sin ye be doin', now mark me word!" and there was an excited tone of warning in the Irishman's voice. "It's callin' back her sowl ye are, whin the good God has it an' her own body be's tellin' ye it cannot come. Troth, a leprechaun himself couldn't brathe life in her now. A wake an' the grave is all that's lift fur her sweet body. God kape it kindly till the ind o' the wurld, say I, an' it's iver prayin' I'll be fur her sowl."

Notwithstanding the man's funereal predictions, Aziel did not cease to do everything to bring back the girl to consciousness. With the cooling water she softly sprinkled Emily's face, speaking to her in soothing tones as she gently bathed the wound, wiping away all traces of blood and laying upon the cut a fold of cloth, over which she bound, with a slight pressure, her own handkerchief. These ministrations tended slowly to restore the patient. She breathed more heavily, and a long-drawn sigh came from her lips. Ere long she again opened her eyes.

With a look of mingled fear and dismay she caught Aziel's hand, and exclaimed, in broken, half-coherent sentences, as she looked wildly around,

"Oh, save him! Father! The man is killing him! Quick! Help! Save him! Father, father!"

Then, suddenly overcome by this effort, her voice and her strength failed her, and she sank again insensible in her companion's arms.

"Oh, the blessed Vargin save us!" said Pat in a husky voice. "Is it murdher she is tellin' us that's goin' on at the hut beyant? Arrah, by the same token, it wor the uligaun I heard this very night as I wor comin' through the woods forninst the miser's hut. Och, wirra, wirra! God save the owld skinflint, if it's his life they be's takin'."

"What was it you heard? Where did you find her?" asked Aziel, turning for an instant to question the man, and then redoubling her efforts at resuscitation.

"It wor comin' through the woods I wor, betwixt O'Hara's and the road beyant," replied Pat in a dry and hollow tone, "when me heart lepped in me mouth, fur, be me sowl, it wor the uligaun I hearn in the tree-tops over me head—"

"The 'uligaun.' What's that?" interrupted Aziel with a touch of alarm in her voice when she saw how grave and rueful was his face.

"Faix, it's not much larnin' I have lyin' heavy on me sthomaich, Misthress Loyd," he answered with a low, deferential shake of his head; "but troth I know the uligaun is the funeral cry—the warnin' o' death;" and his voice uttered the last words with a sepulchral gasp, and casting up his eyes with a pious look, he slowly crossed himself, his lips moving in prayer.

"Oh, save him, save him!" suddenly exclaimed Emily, with eyes still closed, and throwing her arms wildly about and speaking slowly, as if she were struggling with some terrible vision. "That bad man is killing father. I see him standing at the door, and father—dear father—lying dead at his feet. Yes, I see him," her voice growing stronger—"a tall man with black eyes and white face. There's a black beard upon his lips and chin."

She uttered not another word, for Aziel, with a sudden energy as strange as it was excited, was already shaking her, laying her hand with a nervous pressure upon Emily's still-moving lips.

She called her name in a sharp, quick tone that vibrated with the terror now depicted in her own face, even whiter than the girl's had been. No need of further description to tell her who this man was or add one jot to the horrible apprehension that had flashed upon her mind. And yet her heart as suddenly recoiled from the thought that Seth Slade had done such a wicked deed. No, no! He might have committed robbery, but not murder. What should she do? Emily was silent enough now, but she would soon speak again. No one but herself must hear her further revelations. Aziel turned to the Irishman, and evading the meaning, questioning look on his awe-stricken face said, in a whisper of forced calmness,

"Something has happened to this girl's father. Are you afraid to saddle the horse and ride down to his hut to see what is the matter?"

"Afraid, is it ye ask me I am?" he replied after a pause, during which his face had grown deathly white and his knees smote together. "Shure, it's not the divil himself, wid his red-hot pitchfork, that cud frighten Patrick Doyle."

"You will go, then, by yourself, and come straight back and tell me all you see?" she asked, looking up at him with an impatient, pleading face.

"Yis, it's go I will," he said with a courageous shake of his head; "an' it's me own honest heart an' me good shillelah that will defend me agin man an' divil."

"Hurry, then!" putting out her hands imploringly. "Heaven will protect you. But stop!" catching his arm as he was moving away, and speaking to him with greater earnestness. "Promise me, Patrick, you will never tell any one what you heard this girl saying just now. It was only a dream, you know."

"People's dhramas are their own blessed property," he said with a nod as comprehensive as the significant expression of his countenance; "an' it's Patrick Doyle's tongue as can sleep when he bids it."

"How good you are, Patrick!" and Aziel seized his hand with a grateful pressure. "Before you go I wish you would carry her up to my room. It's dangerous for her to lie here longer in her wet clothes. First, though, let me give her something to make her sleep quietly until morning."

As Aziel held the sleeping-potion to the girl's lips and softly bid her drink it, Emily did so, slowly opening her eyes, and with something like a glance of recognition murmured, half articulately,

"His mother! You will love me!"

The woman answered with a soothing kiss as the eyes closed with the faintest smile, and the lips again were silent.

"Take her gently in your arms," said Aziel to the man, who, in obedience to her gesture, was already bending over the girl with a compassionate face.

"Troth, it's handlin' her gently I'd be as if she wor an angel made o' glass," whispered Pat, slowly raising the body and following Aziel, who, light in hand, led the way up stairs, her eyes never once off the girl's face.

On reaching the upper landing they were met by Mrs. Gagger, who was so astonished by the strange group that she could only stand and look at them with a silent, questioning stare.

"It's the miser's daughter," said Aziel in an undertone, with a gesture of silence. "Patrick found her lying in the road, and brought her here. I will tell you all about it as soon as we have laid her in bed."

The man deposited his burden on the couch, and in response to a whispered word from Aziel went out and left the two women alone with the sleeper. In a short time they had silently disrobed her. As they were doing this Aziel, unnoticed by her companion, deftly secreted in her own pocket a letter which fell from the loosened folds of the girl's dress. At last they laid her down peacefully at rest, a faint flush upon her cheeks and the red tide again tinging her half-closed lips.

"She is very beautiful. No wonder he loved her," said Mrs. Gagger, casting a parting look of admiration at

the girl as they passed softly out into the hall, leaving the door slightly ajar behind them. "Come into my room now," speaking to Aziel, "and tell me what has happened. You know I have said several times to-day that I had a presentiment of evil. Can it be possible—"

She stopped short, caught at her heart, and looked at Aziel with a fear as well defined in her countenance as to its object as words could have expressed it. Aziel quickly swayed the candle in front of her own face, so that the other could not see in it the half-suppressed response to her suspicion as to who had been this night working this evil at the miser's cottage.

"Hark! there comes Patrick. We shall know all now," Aziel whispered with averted face as she thrust the candle into Mrs. Gagger's hand and went swiftly down the staircase. In another moment she was standing at the open door, gazing with a white, agitated face at the swaying lantern, which was borne up the lane at a rapid rate.

"Is it ye, Misthress Loyd?" exclaimed Doyle in a husky, excited voice as he leaped from the horse and stood in front of her, a broad smile of relief upon his perspiring face. "Shure, it's good news I have. Divil a murdher is there at all, at all. There's nayther hide nor hair o' a sowl in the hut beyant. Ould Gruntle's gone, and the dog wid him."

"The miser gone? Are you sure? Did you look everywhere for him?"

"Troth, it's sware a hole in an iron pot I could that he's gone. Faix, it's all through the hut I wor, from the cellar to the garret, wid me lantern in ivery nook o' the dhirty place. It's the colleen's own door I broke wid a blow o' me foot. An' it's nayther ould Gruntle nor the dog I found, nor," lowering his voice to a mysterious whisper, "the other divil's limb that the purty colleen tould us a while ago wor wid him."

"Did you search the barn and all around the garden?" Aziel asked, as if she could not yet trust the hope that began to illumine her face.

"Indeed did I, wid eyes as sharp as briers. Shure, it's not tindin' his sthock nor cultivatin' his garden Mr. Gruntle is doin' this night. It's iverywhere I searched

for him, an' not a clap o' me eyes on the ould faggot did I get for me throuble."

"I wonder what has become of him?" she said, speaking more to herself than to the other.

"What's become o' him?" echoed Pat with a solemn voice and a wise shake of his head. "Faix, it's me own opinion that the divil has taken his own this night an' flew away wid him, dog an' all!"

"Let us hope that he is not so badly off as that. We may be able to trace his whereabouts to-morrow. You have done bravely to-night, Pat. I thank you from the bottom of my heart," as she shook his hand and bade him good-night.

"Arrah! For the loikes of ye, Misthress Loyd, I wud go to the inds o' the 'arth, an' take a smell o' sulphur besides. It's almost the aqual ye are o' Mary O'Hara, Heaven bliss the little desaiver!" and with a modest look of admiration at his companion, he took the bridle-rein of his horse in his hand and went on toward the barn.

When Aziel turned and shut the door, she found Mrs. Gagger close beside her. She had heard all. Their countenances met, but on each was the look of relief the other understood.

Seth Slade would have laughed heartily had he known how easily convinced they were that he had committed no evil this night, at least.

CHAPTER XXXII.

UNEXPECTED REVELATIONS.

THE first sign of returning consciousness that Nicholas Grundle felt was a feeble sensation of being asleep—a sensation as yet so dull, so faint, in its effect upon the suspended state of his nervous sensibilities that it made no definite impression upon his brain or roused within it the slightest effort at thought. Bodily functions and intelligence alike seemed floating in an existence intangible to the apprehension of the deadened nerves and relaxed

muscles. But as the brain, slowly wakening, began to stir in the mysterious depths of its being, and grope about amid the shapeless fantasies that crowded in upon it, the miser gradually became aware that he was not sleeping, but dreaming. Lying upon his back he must be, dreaming troublous, horrible dreams that grew more startling every instant. Malignant faces were peering into his eyes and laughing hoarsely and tauntingly in his ears, whispering threatening words the fearful meaning of which he could not wholly apprehend. Where was he lying, to be so restless as this? Surely such a nightmare had never before come to him in his bed. Yet where else could he be? For he was sleeping so soundly that, try as he did, with all his might, to waken himself, he could neither speak nor move. On the contrary, he became vividly conscious of two facts—that he was fast asleep and powerless to awake. Meanwhile, the fiends, changing their distorted forms at will, danced and gesticulated more madly around and over him. They shrieked and laughed, pulled his hair and pinched him, and blew smoke and fire into his face, that could not turn itself away a hair's breadth from this torment. They told him, with hiss and howl, how completely they had him in their power. Shriekingly they threatened that soon they would fly with him to their deep, dark cavern of endless torture, far down in the earth, which was opening already at his very side with a black, yawning chasm. Terrified, he struggled to roll away from this awful brink, which nearer came, and nearer still. But his legs were lead, his arms iron, and a great weight on his chest pressed him more closely to the ground.

At last, as a fiend more hideous than the others caught his throat in two skeleton hands that dripped with warm blood and drew him down upon the chasm's slippery edge, he made one mighty effort to escape. With this convulsive motion of his body there came a violent shock to him, as if a sharp blow had been struck upon his head. There was a snapping explosion at the base of his brain, like that of a pistol, and an electric flash ran along his spine. Instantly, but with no volition on his part, his eyes opened. But they again closed as quickly, for they

had seen nothing and their lids were heavy. But the dream was over. The frightful voices no longer made the darkness vibrate with unseen terrors. The dreadful figures had vanished. A grateful sense of relief, which his persistent sleepiness did not wholly efface, stole over him, for his mind faintly struggled to retain this idea of deliverance from danger. He remained in this state of delicious drowsiness a long while, conscious only of a dim sensation of quiet existence. And certainly he looked in blissful rest, lying there as calm as any child. His head rested upon his outstretched arm, and his face, over which gleamed the dull light of the fire, was placid in every feature, a trifle of a smile lingering around his mouth. Suddenly he gave a start, though no noise or outward disturbance had given him cause for such a quick outward movement of his hand, which groped above his head an instant, and then fell limp upon the floor. Whether it were the falling of this hand or the passing blast of the tempest, something had aroused him. He opened his eyes again. This time there was an expression of reviving intelligence in them, though nothing beyond a questioning gaze, with which he looked steadily before him.

Presently the fireplace, slowly outlining itself in his vision, definitely fixed itself on his glimmering consciousness, and by the power of association began to tell him where he was. These old brass andirons looked very like his own; only, as he bent his eyes upon them, they began to whirl about and dance as the fiends had done in his dreams. Was he still asleep, or was he awake? He slowly raised himself upon his elbow and put his hand to his head, which was dizzier now, and full of ringing sounds, such as those made by the clanging of distant bells. He knew his eyes were open, but he saw nothing, only a dull, confused light, in which were shadows and shapes and tiny clouds. He swayed to and fro, his brain growing dizzier still, and a deathly nausea coming over him. He fell back upon the floor with something like a moan, and again lay rigid and lifeless. But not long did he remain so. The wind, seudding through the open door, tossed his locks over his face and sported with his withered rags, darting in and out upon his shriveled

limbs until such a cold shiver ran over him that he awoke, this time with a vigorous movement and a sudden alertness of attention. Where was that cold draught coming from? Was his window raised? He started up on his elbow, and, with something of the old shrewdness coming back to his eyes, shot a swift glance around him. The log in the fireplace fell apart, sending its bright expiring glow throughout the room. In this light the full revelation of who and where he was flashed upon him, and memory as instantly recalled the events of the night, though confusedly at first.

For a moment he was dazed, sitting now bolt upright on the floor, his head pressed between his hands and his eyes staring wildly about him in the dusky darkness of the room. In another instant his mind grew suddenly clear. With a shudder and an exclamation of horror he remembered it all. The stranger, the valise, the strange smell, the struggle, the— With a piteous cry he rose, staggering to his feet. What a fearful suggestion had taken possession of his thoughts! His limbs shook so he could scarcely stand. His breath was short and thick with suffocating gasps; his heart seemed to be fluttering with its very last beats. His treasure, his gold! Was it safe, or had the man robbed him? He was crying like a child now, feeling his way along the side of the room toward the cellar-door. When he had reached it and put out his hands and found it standing wide open, he gave one long, despairing shriek, as if indeed he had gone mad without recall, and dashed headlong down the stairway. Every sense was keenly active, and he sped across the cellar-floor in the darkness, as certain in his direction as if the light of day had guided him. He seized hold of the box. It had been moved. With a furious yell he clutched at the wall to find the movable stone. It was not there; and his arm, thrust into the cavity with a deeper cry of misery, found neither bag nor remnant of his treasure. It was gone. He had been robbed of the one only work of his life—that which to him was life itself.

Only for an instant did he stand struck dumb with the immensity of his loss and unable to give any expression

to his grief. Appalled and overwhelmed though he was, his mind did not wholly forget its cunning, nor did the hope of regaining his treasure entirely forsake him. As quickly as he had come into the cellar, he now made his way out of it. As soon as he had reached the room above he groped about for the valise. His hands fell upon it; he shook it. It was still heavy. Trembling and speechless—for no sound had escaped his lips since he had found his treasure gone—he crept over to the mantel. Here he took a match from the little box, upon which he readily laid his hand. Striking this, he held it in front of him, and soon found the candle on the floor. Lighting it, he hurried to the woodshed, giving the dog, lying apparently almost dead, but a passing glance. Seizing the axe, he came back to the valise, and putting down the candle swung the weapon in the air. It was a series of powerful blows he dealt the valise—blows far stronger than one would have thought could come from his feeble arms. Away across the room flew the padlock. Into the other locks the blade crushed. The valise fell open. As it parted asunder the old man threw aside the axe, and dropped upon his knees in the midst of the contents, which rolled out before him. Eagerly he seized the largest and heaviest package. It was round and wrapped in an old newspaper. He tore aside the covering, and held in his hand—a stone! Only a stone—a common boulder! A hundred such one might pick up along the village road. The miser made no outcry at this discovery, nor did he unwrap another one of the parcels that the broken and empty valise had strewed in a little pile upon the floor. Gazing at them with a look of stupid wonder, he slowly drew his hand across his eyes, and a light, husky laugh came in little fits from his lips. He shook his head with a playful gesture, and laying his hands upon his sides swayed forward and backward, laughing immoderately at this odd heap of stones, each one wrapped in a paper. It was a funny idea—very funny, indeed. The stranger was a joker in truth—an immensely funny man!

His mirth ceased abruptly. His face changed as instantly from smiles to frowns, from a meaningless stare to

a fearful, questioning look. He grasped the candle in hands that trembled with the apprehension that had seized him, and ran toward the stairway which led to the floor above. Uttering short cries as piteous as those with which he had hastened to the hiding-place of his treasure in the cellar, he mounted the stairway and staggered toward the door of Emily's room. How the key shook in his hand and rattled in the lock! The cold perspiration broke out upon him, making him shiver from head to foot, as if he were standing outside in the storm without a shred of covering. What if she too were gone? This awful fear so took away what little strength he had that he could hardly turn the key, creaking with ominous resistance, and push open the door. A gust of wind flared the light in his hand. He tottered into the room, his lips able only to breathe out her name as he looked wildly about him and saw that she was gone. Suddenly and strangely calm he became, standing there like a statue, the candle clutched in his outstretched hand. His eyes slowly wandered about the room with a vacant gaze, yet he understood it all—the empty bed, the open window. She had fled, and with *him*! Leaped from this window to run away with the man who had robbed her father! He said never a word, gave vent to no exclamation of surprise or grief. Only a stony and threatening look came into his eyes as he still stood motionless, looking first at the bed and then at the window.

At last a gleam of cunning came to his face. Over his wrinkles stole a crafty smile, deepening each instant, until it had merged into a spasmodic laugh that rapidly subsided into a low, quiet chuckle. He turned away with a quick step and went down the stairs. He eagerly sought the dog, and kneeling down beside him called his name in a loud, agitated voice, snatching aside the white and strongly-odorons cloth which covered the animal's face. Cæsar did not waken. He lay there apparently lifeless, his eyes closed, a stream of white froth issuing from his clenched teeth. Yet he was breathing, for the old man, holding his hand close to the creature's mouth, felt the faint breath upon it. Cæsar's heart was beating. The miser could feel its gentle throbbing under his own tremulous palm, laid upon the animal's shaggy chest. He gently shook the dog, shout-

ing his name. Then, as this had no effect to arouse the mastiff, he ran and fetched a pitcher of water, which he dashed upon the creature's head. This attempt was effectual. The dog turned himself slowly over upon his paws, slightly raised his head, and opened his eyes with a faint growl. But he closed them again, and his head drooped to the floor. Grundle fetched more water. He bathed the mastiff's face with it, talking to him all the while in affectionate tones. Finally, Cæsar again opened his eyes and gave a bark of recognition. Then he raised his huge body upon his feet, shaking himself with something of his wonted vigor. Patting the dog and putting a pan of water beside him, the miser left him and began to busy himself actively about the house. First he went to his own room, from which he descended in a short time with a small, well-filled carpet-bag. Setting this upon the floor, he opened the chest of drawers, and selecting from them several packages rolled them into one and placed it beside the bag. All this while his face grew more cunning in its glances and the cautious, meaning smile hovered steadily about his lips. He put on his old brown overcoat and his black, napless hat. He took his hickory staff from its corner, and with it an umbrella, faded and dusty. Thus equipped, he loosened the dog's chain from the staple. Holding one end of this chain in his hand, he bade the animal follow him. Picking up his valise and bundle, he went out of the open door, not so much as once stopping to look back at the place he was leaving. As they were passing near the grape-vine under Emily's window the mastiff gave a bark and tugged at his chain. The old man pulled him back and spoke sharply to him, but Cæsar only barked the louder, running his nose along the ground under the grape-vine. Grundle stopped and dropped the chain.

"Find out which way she has gone if you can," he said, pulling out a girl's shoe from his pocket and rubbing it over the dog's nose.

Louder barked Cæsar. He darted with a whine beneath the grape-vine, then sprang hither and thither in the darkness, examining every foot of ground around them. At last, unable to find the trail of his mistress—for the rain

had obliterated the scent that would have given him guidance—he crept to the feet of his master and whined pit-eously, as if he thoroughly comprehended what a failure he had made.

“Never mind, Cæsar; you shall yet find them for me,” said the old man, patting him and again taking his hold upon the chain. “The world is not wide enough for them to hide long from us.”

He went down the garden-path, past the willow copse, taking the direction of the railroad, if indeed he were going to any definite place, plunging along as he did through the rain and the darkness, laughing now and then so immoderately that even Cæsar, who was gravely following, once broke out into a hilarious bark.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN EARLY HOUR AT THE FARM-HOUSE.

THE first gray streaks of dawn were glancing athwart the sky when Aziel awoke and saw Emily still slumbering peacefully beside her. She arose and with noiseless steps made her toilet; then, softly drawing aside the window-curtain, she sat down at the side of the bed. Lightly stroking the cheek of the sleeper, Aziel bent over her, and with a face of forced calmness awaited her awakening. Soon there was a long, quivering breath. Emily turned her head with a slow, restless motion, and slowly opening her eyes fixed them upon the watcher with a weary, questioning look, which gradually merged into a faint smile of recognition. Although it was evident from the feebleness of Emily’s gaze that the effect of the narcotic was still upon her, she put out her hand with a groping gesture and laid hold of Aziel’s palm, slowly drawing it down to her own cheek with a clinging pressure.

“Poor child!” murmured the woman, soothingly caressing Emily’s hair with her disengaged hand. “You have nothing to fear now. You are safe here.”

"Where am I?" asked Emily, glancing around the room with a faint look of wonder, and then nestling the clasped hand closer to her face.

"Do you not remember," said Aziel with a quiet smile and in a tone as calm as if she were relating the most ordinary adventure, "that you were frightened last night by something in your own home? that you ran away from the house and along the road, where you fell upon a stone that hurt you here," pointing at the wound, "but not badly? It was only a flesh-cut. It will soon be well."

The girl's memory had slowly recovered itself while the woman was speaking. The passive look gradually died out of her face, for the recollection of the night before, imperfect though it was, aroused in her mind a feeling of alarm. There came now the quick comprehension of all that had happened. Her father's cry for help again rang in her ears.

"My father!" she suddenly exclaimed, starting up with an affright that made every feature pallid with anxious terror; "where is *he*? Oh, do not tell me he is dead—"

"No, child!" quickly interrupted Aziel, laying her hand upon the trembling girl with a tender caress. "Nothing wrong has befallen your father. He is alive—"

"Alive! Is he here? Oh, take me to him!" and Emily, more excited, began to wring her hands and cry for very joy, beseeching her companion to no longer keep her from her father's sight.

"You must be calmer," replied Aziel with a look of admonition. "You ought to be satisfied for the present to know that your father is alive and well. Perhaps to-day you shall see him."

"Where is he? Isn't he here?" she asked, trying to repress her tears, though her voice was still agitated, and her look of anxious solicitude grew more earnest as her companion replied to this last question with a negative shake of the head.

"No, your father is not here," resumed Aziel. "Yet I am sure you will soon see him. But come! Now that you are assured your father is safe from harm, tell me what it was that happened in your home last night."

Knowing this, I shall be the better able to take you to your father."

It was some moments before Emily could sufficiently compose herself to comply with this request, for the terrible scenes through which she had passed began to be magnified by her imagination as memory recalled them. That piercing cry coming up from the room below was all that she could now think of. She shuddered and wept afresh, bewailing the fate of her father, asserting between her choking sobs that she should never see him again. It was only when Aziel had again assured Emily that her father was alive, and had insisted upon the narration as necessary to the finding of him, that the girl restrained the tumultuous expression of her grief, and told in broken tones, tremulous at times with fear, the story of the previous night.

Aziel listened to the narration with that habitual look of calmness made so easy to her by the constant repression of her feelings. There was not the slightest change in her passive face as she heard the description of the stranger, the story of his first appearance at the miser's hut, his odd valise, his subsequent confidential interviews with Nicholas Grundle, and of his final visit, which had ended with the cry of "Murder!" and the flight of the girl. It was only when Emily had ceased speaking that a smile that had a touch of hardness in it came over Aziel's face, and she said, in her even voice,

"Perhaps, after all, this man was an old friend of your father. They may have had business together which your father did not wish you to hear. Nor is it unlikely that you may have merely imagined you heard your father call for help. You were very much excited, you must remember; you were in the second story, and there was a closed door between you and them. How easy it was for you, a frightened child, to mistake a cry of carousal for one of fear! You should be very careful how you tell this story to any one besides myself. You might get an innocent man into trouble. In fact, I think you ought to keep your suspicions a secret—at least, until they are confirmed by something more likely than what you have been telling me. And you must confess they are only suspicions when I tell you that I sent Patrick Doyle down to your father's

house soon after you were brought here, and that he found no trace of any such scenes as you describe. He went all over your house from cellar to garret, through the barn, and everywhere in the garden. He saw nothing and heard nothing. He could find neither your father nor the stranger you have described. What else can you think but that these two men went away together, having some business in common known only to themselves?"

"Did you say father has gone away?" Emily slowly questioned, with a dazed face, over which was creeping a white look of dismay.

"He may not have gone far away," replied the other, consolingly; "but it is certain he was not in his house, nor anywhere near it, last night when Patrick was there. Did you see no signs yesterday of any preparations of his for leaving his home?"

"Yes, now I remember," said the girl hesitatingly, as if she were recalling something indistinct. "He was alone nearly all day in his room, working with boxes and trunks. I heard him say very often, too, that we should soon go away to a new home. He said he would take me with him. Oh, it cannot be," she exclaimed, as if a suspicion of desertion had suddenly flashed upon her, "that father has gone and left me alone! No, no! He loved me too much for that!" and despite Aziel's protestations, she burst into a passionate flood of tears, and burying her face in the pillow wept bitterly.

"It is very unjust in you to be so ready to accuse your father of so cruel an act as deserting you," said Aziel, tenderly stroking the girl's head. "Your love for him ought to give you more faith in his affection for you. Why do you not rather believe with me that he has gone away only for a short time, and that he will soon return again to you?"

"I will believe it!" quickly rejoined Emily with a little burst of energy and smiling through her tears. "Dear father! how wicked it was for me to doubt him! And how good in you to tell me how bad I was!" she added, putting her arms around Aziel's neck and kissing her with an exuberant thankfulness. "Oh, I know I shall love you more dearly every day! You are so kind to me.

"You are so willing to help me. But Volney told me," she added with a little bashful whisper as she hid her face in the other's bosom, "that you would love me very soon, and be a mother to me as well as to him."

Though Aziel hesitated for a moment to speak and undeceive the girl, she knew it was the only course she could pursue to retain the confidence which Emily was reposing in her; and retain it she must, for the sake of her boy's happiness, if not for her own. So, though the effort tested all her powers of self-control, and, despite them, brought something of the old look of distress into her face, she said quietly, though with a slight tremor in her voice,

"Why do you call me his mother? I was only his nurse. But I love him as much as a mother could, and will love you the same if you will only let me."

"You are not his mother?" looking up into her face with a puzzled and half-grieved expression. "I thought you told me yesterday you were."

"No; you were mistaken. I don't remember that I said so. What interest could I have had in thus deceiving you?" was the quiet reply. "But even if I am not his mother, I can care for him and you the same as if I were. See, here is his letter to you. I took care of it last night. You had better keep it secret while you are here."

"I am so sorry you are not his mother. I was beginning to love you so much," said Emily, her frank face falling with undisguised disappointment, after she had hidden the letter, with a faintly-blushing glance, beneath the pillow and again looked up at her companion.

"Cannot you love me still for what I have been to him and will be to you?" asked Aziel. Eagerly the girl put out her hands and brought Aziel's face, that had a hurt and sorrowful look upon it, down to her own. Then, kissing the trembling lips, she murmured,

"Forgive me, please. I did not intend to wound your feelings. I will love you just the same, and you shall love me, too, all you can. Perhaps," she went on, after the other had silently returned her embrace, "you can get his mother to love me. Do you think she will?"

"She cannot help it," replied Aziel, cheerily, looking down into the childish face with a glance of triumph and

admiration. "She saw you for the first time last night while you were asleep here, and I know you touched her heart. This morning you will see her," lowering her voice, "but you must not expect too much of her at first. Give her love time to grow, and it will be all the stronger for your waiting. But we cannot talk longer now. I must hurry down stairs to my work. Meanwhile, you can dress yourself. See!" pointing to a chair near by; "here are some clothes of mine I fixed for you last night. They may be a little too large, but they will do until your own are thoroughly dried."

Kissing Emily and bidding her be of good cheer, Aziel left the room and went softly down stairs, for as yet there was no sound of rising in Mrs. Gagger's apartment.

Going straight to the kitchen, Aziel started her fire and hastily began her preparations for breakfast, for the old clock striking seven with no sleepy chime admonished her of delay. As she thus busied herself she glanced out at the barn several times, and began to wonder why at this late hour there were so few signs of life about it. Its doors were closed, and looking more intently now, she did not see Doyle moving about as usual with his easy, shuffling step, nor did she hear his morning song; for Patrick never worked without singing persistently in his loudest voice. Her curiosity thoroughly aroused by this unusual quiet, Aziel threw on her hood and hurried to the barn. So many strange things had happened of late that she would not be wholly surprised, she thought, should she find that Pat had hung himself to a rafter in a fit of jealousy. As she came around the corner of the house the sound of voices met her ear. Glancing down the lane in their direction, she saw a sight that surprised her nearly as much as Pat's rigid body might have done. A loaded wagon, piled high with all sorts of furniture, and with a cow tied behind it, was coming toward her, and beside it walked O'Hara, Doyle and Volney Slade, all evidently engaged in an excited conversation.

As she stood watching them with a bewildered gaze, and unable in her astonishment to move a pace in their direction, Doyle was the first to catch sight of her. As he did so he swung his hat with an air of triumph, and,

saying something to Volney, these two quickened their steps and joined her.

"Azriel," exclaimed Volney, after his hasty greeting was over, "what has happened here since I went away? Pat has been telling me the greatest story of horrors I ever heard, until I hardly know whether I am in the land of the living or of the dead. First tell me," the anxiety on his face deepening and his voice suddenly becoming husky, "is it true Emily is here?"

"Yes, but she is well. It was only a trifling hurt," Azriel quickly added, seeing the frightened look that had leaped into his face as she spoke the word "yes."

"Thank Heaven for that!" he ejaculated under his drawn breath. "So that Emily is safe, it matters little to me what else has happened;" and he tossed his head with a light smile of indifference.

"Shure, it's a foine lot o' furnichure we've brought ye so airly in the mornin', an' a moighty foine cow, barrin' her horns, Misthress Loyd," interrupted Dennis O'Hara, who had brought his cart to a stand-still in front of the group and was bowing and scraping to Azriel, with his hat and his head held low before her. "Throth, if the cart had been bigger, it's the ould miser's hut Pat wud a had on it, shure."

"What is the meaning of this?" questioned Azriel, turning to Doyle, whose face was in a broad grin of satisfaction.

"By the sivin blissid candles, it's as aisy as kissin' hands to tell how it all wor!" answered Doyle, flourishing his cap toward the cart. "An' it's meself that had the rale jayneous to circumvant it, an' lave nothin' for the lawyers, wid their suckin'-power o' leeches, to lay their dhirty hands on in the hut beyant of old Gruntle's."

"Is this Mr. Grundle's furniture?" asked Azriel with a dumfounded look at the motley array heaped in the greatest disorder upon the wagon.

"Indade it is—nothin' more nor liss. An' it's moighty lucky fur the poor colleen we have it here safe out o' the grip o' the lawyers, Heaven sind thim repintance! It's stalin' it they wud be doin' afore the sun wor up an hour higher."

"What right had you to bring it away?" interposed

Volney with a doubtful shake of his head. "I am afraid, Pat, this will get you into trouble. Suppose Mr. Grundle should come back to-day; what then? It is you who would be taken up for stealing, not the lawyers."

"Oh, don't be goin' on wid yer humbuggin', Masther Volney," said Doyle after he had scratched and rubbed his head in every direction for a satisfactory reply. "Shure, it's not a hair o' Misther Gruntle we'll iver see in these parts agin. 'Pon me sowl, it's flew away wid the divil he is entirely, an' it's O'Hara here knows how he wor goin'."

"Yis; it's the rale thruth—God's own word—Patrick is tellin' ye," spoke up Dennis with a face as dismal as his voice. "Old Gruntle towld me yesterday, wid his own lips, he wor goin' away this mornin', an' he bid me come at five o'clock to see him goin' an' help him wid the cart. Shure, he towld me to say nothin' to no one about it. Faix, I tried to kape the sayeret, but it's the owld woman tormented the life out o' me till I towld her, an' thin, whin she promised a tight tongue on it all, she up and tells Mary, an' she, shure, wid a tongue as loose as her mother's, tells Pat here whin he wor sparkin' her last night, the desateful rogue, wid the honey on his lips that drew the sayeret out o' her like the cork o' a bottle o' good spirits—"

"Hark to his goostherumfoodle!" interrupted Pat, giving him a loud, resounding slap on the ribs with the back of his hand. "Arrah, now, can't ye be aisy wid yer tongue, runnin' on like the clapper o' a bell that niver sthops.—Shure, it's goin' on wid the story I'd be," addressing himself to the others, "an' not be takin' up yer blessed time wid his nonsense 'twixt the colleen an' me. Heaven bliss the dew on her purty lips, say I! Well, be this and that, it's down at the hut beyant I wor this mornin', afore daylight, wid me lantern, waitin' fur O'Hara an' his cart. Niver mind," with a sly wink, "how I knew he wor comin'. An' whin he cum an' seen me sthandin' in the door, shure, it's the howl o' him ye ought to have heard, an' the foine elevation, bedad, he give his heels, lavin' his cart in the middle of the road. 'O'Hara,' says I, callin' to him wid me sides sphiittin' wid the laughter that wor chokin' me, 'is it a ghost ye

take me fur? Cum back out o' that, ye gommoch,' says I. 'It' not a ghost that's livin' in me flesh an' bones yit,' says I—"

"Come, Pat!" interrupted Volney with an impatient nod; "make your story shorter, or it will be an hour before you come to any point in it."

"Indade, Masther Volney, it's a longer time than that same that people wid more larnin' on their stomachs than I takes to tell a sthory widout any point at all, at all. But it's not tirin' ye wid me discoorse I'd be, like the praist in the church beyant—whist! it's bowld I am to poke fun at him, shure, Heaven bless His Rivirence!—so I'll be tellin' ye the rest as short as a woman sphakes to a man a year after their weddin'. It's all through the miser's hut we wint, O'Hara an' me, from the cellar to the garret, pokin' our noses wid the vartue of curiosity in ivery crook an' corner o' the same. An' shure impty o' life as the grave it all wor, an' sthill as the heart o' a ghost. Thin it's out to the barn we wint, an' sarched it through, but it's not owld Gruntle we found at all, at all, only the purty baste forninst ye there, wid her one horn as if her masther wor begrudgin' her the other. 'Well,' says I to O'Hara, 'it's flew away wid the divil the miser has wid his goold, so it's his lavin's we'll put in the cart, an' carry thim to the colleen fur the partin' gift o' the owld sthrap o' her father.' An' so, be the same token, it's here we be, wid all the furnichure and the baste, barrin' her other horn, which O'Hara wor lookin' for a long time in her sthall a while ago. Faix, it's certain I am he wor thinkin' she wor puttin' it on an' off like a colleen the shoe on her purty foot."

"Well, now that you have finished your story," said Volney, "what do you propose to do with these traps?" pointing to the wagon with a derisive smile.

"Wirra! wirra!" exclaimed Pat, throwing up his hands in utter astonishment and turning to O'Hara. "Listen to the pride o' him! Traps, is it? Shure, it's a cabinful o' illegant things they are, an' many's the colleen that wud moisten her eyes at the sight o' them."

"We will not further discuss their value," the young man rejoined. "The question now is, What shall be

done with them? You had better stow them in the barn for the present. When Miss Grundle is informed of what you have done, she will decide as to their further disposal ;” and so saying, he turned away with Aziel and entered the house.

“Traps, is it?” muttered Pat as he and O’Hara went with the load toward the barn. “Shure, it’s moighty high Masther Volney is holdin’ his head this mornin’.”

“But who be’s payin’ me fur haulin’ the load?” asked O’Hara in a lugubrious tone. “Is it a foine job wid no money in it I’ve bin doin’?”

“Och, get out o’ that!” growled Doyle, flinging a withering look at him. “Is it afraid o’ doin’ a good turn fur the orphan ye are, Misther O’Hara, and thrustin’ to the good God above fur yer pay?”

“It’s the owld woman that will be axin’ me fur the price o’ the job,” persisted O’Hara with a dubious shake of his head.

“Is it the owld woman ye be afeerd o’?” rejoined Doyle in a mocking voice. “Thin I’ll give ye a rimedy that will quiet the covetous sowl o’ her.”

“For the tindher mercy o’ Heaven, make haste an’ tell me what it is! Troth, I’ve tried ivery orgument wid her, and it’s proof agin all she is, bad luck to her!”

“Take a stout sthrap to her back, thin,” said Pat with an encouraging glance. “It will quiet the wind o’ her an’ do the muscles o’ yer arms a power o’ good.”

“Blur an’ agers, ye can keep yer advice fur yer own use, Patrick Doyle, fur it’s nayther eyes nor hair I’d have if I followed it.”

“It’s not much hair she’s left on ye, anyhow, wid the top o’ yer head shinin’ loike the vane on the church beyant,” replied Doyle with a grin as they reached the barn and prepared to unload the wagon.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A MOTHER'S SCHEME.

WHETHER it were the natural jealousy of a mother at the transference of her child's affections to a stranger, or her love for that child, now aroused by a realizing sense of her own isolation in the world, or a parental desire for her son's fullest and easiest success in life, certainly it was one, or perhaps all three, of these considerations that influenced Mrs. Gagger as she softly entered Aziel's room and stood looking silently with a restrained smile of recognition at Emily, who as silently glanced up at her with a timid, shrinking face.

"I am pleased to see that you have so soon recovered from your accident," the woman said, slowly advancing with folded hands toward the chair in which Emily was seated. "Do not rise," as the girl made a weary motion to do so. "I observe you are still weak. I shall stay but a moment."

The haughty bearing of Mrs. Gagger, her cold face and emotionless voice, sent a little shudder of fear through the listener. Emily's countenance quickly lost its faint smile of greeting, and her hand, which she had timidly extended toward her companion, fell in her lap with a half-frightened motion, while her eyes sank away from that chilling gaze.

"I imagine, from your manner," resumed Mrs. Gagger, still standing statue-like, and her tones as rigid as the position she had assumed, "that you think I am angry with you. But I am not angry with you; I am only displeased with what you have done. There is yet time for you to right the wrong if you so choose, and for the purpose of getting you to do this I am here. Unless your appearance deceives me, I am sure you will be influenced and guided by a mother's appeal."

"Please tell me what wrong I have done?" Emily asked eagerly, putting out her hands with a pleading gesture and fixing her wide-open blue eyes on the other's passionless face with a startled expression.

"I am willing to say that I do not think it is a wrong of which you are as yet conscious, for all of us do things in our selfish moments the evil results of which we cannot foresee, so blinded are we by our own feelings, our own interests. Without our own consciousness, these intrude and affect us. But when some kind friend more mature in the world's experience points out our errors to us, is it not our duty to correct them without that delay which might strengthen our evil judgment, and bring only ruin and remorse where we had sought success and happiness?"

The girl quickly though quietly nodded assent, with a countenance more bewildered now, for she was trying earnestly though vainly to comprehend the meaning of the woman's words. What had she done to bring upon her these reproofs? This question ran riot through Emily's mind. And yet, so pure had her life been, not even an imaginary wrong suggested itself in answer. The other went on:

"I shall now speak more frankly. There is nothing to conceal in this matter, for it is an issue of happiness or misery to both you and Volney. Concealment would only aggravate the danger I wish to avert. You profess to love my son, and have promised to marry him. Am I correct?"

"Yes," at length faltered the girl, drooping her scarlet face upon her bosom to hide her blushes, and the frightened tears as well which had crept suddenly into her eyes.

"Then, loving him, it will be the easier for you to serve him. What we do for those we love is the best test of our affection—the only proof, indeed, of its existence—and the surest measure of its strength. You love him well enough, devotedly enough, to seek his happiness instead of your own? You are willing to be miserable, if need be, in order that he may win success in the world and be always happy? Answer me: could you do this—will you do it—for *him*?"

"Oh, I would do anything for his sake!" cried Emily, her face aglow with a loving consecration, little dreaming what the woman meant. "Tell me how I can help him, what I can do to make him happy—oh, so very happy. I

will never, never forget you if you will only tell me this."

She stretched out her hands in her ardent entreaty, her heart, overflowing with love's tenderest yearning, flooding her eyes with happy tears.

"Sacrifice is the law of happiness," replied Mrs. Gagger, her voice and countenance strangely calm in comparison with the bated breath and solicitous face of the girl, who eagerly caught at every word. "Forgetfulness of ourselves is oftenest the best remembrance we can bestow on those we love. True love cares not so much for the present as for the future happiness of the object of its affections. You say you love my son. I do not doubt you think you have given him your whole heart. I see you would quickly tell me you are ready to make any sacrifice, however great, for his welfare. But I do not wish you to do this; I only ask that you will take back your promise to marry him—that you will let him go forth into the world to make his fame and fortune without the hindrance you would be to him as his wife. Do you love him enough for that? or would you, by marrying him, make his struggles for a livelihood all the harder, and by the burdens and cares of married life bring failure upon him? Failure to him would be poverty and misery and remorse, and what other evils I know not, but can only fear them with all a mother's anxious love."

Emily was crying bitterly and wringing her little hands, her white, scared face mutely begging the other to say no more. At last, with an energy born of the horror of these words, she cried,

"Do not say that I would be so cruel to him! I love him with all my heart. Sooner than make him unhappy for a moment I would be willing to never see him again. But I thought he would be so happy with me," she went on with a touch of sadness in her despairing tones. "He told me so."

"Ah! he is so young!" said Mrs. Gagger softly, coming closer and laying her hand upon the girl's head, bowed in an agony of tears. "Volney knows nothing of life—its trials and hardships. Little does he imagine to what misery he would doom you both, marrying, as you two chil-

dren would, without friends or money. It is for you to warn him of the evil that he would so innocently bring upon himself. It is your duty, made the easier by your love, to show him what a burden you would be to him when the world shall use him hardly, and he shall slave and toil in vain to escape the poverty and failure that will follow him all the more closely because of your being his wife."

Emily made no reply beyond her broken sobs and a low moan that now and then escaped her lips. She clasped her face in her cold hands, and swayed to and fro in her anguish as if she were slowly but steadily tearing from her heart every hope that love had nurtured there so happily.

"Listen!" exclaimed the woman under her breath with a little start. "That is his voice. Yes," after a pause; "he has returned. I will leave you to think of what I have said," stepping quickly toward the door. "Remember, you can make him happy or miserable—happy if you let him go free; miserable if you bind him to you."

Mrs. Gagger glided noiselessly from the room and entered her own apartment as the door at the bottom of the staircase was opened and a light foot sprang up the steps.

A moment later Volney had passed his mother's closed room, and with a light, impulsive rap on Emily's door had opened it and stood before her. So absorbed was she in her grief that she had heard no sound of his coming, and now that she thought she was alone she was giving expression to her overburdened heart in half-articulate exclamations of sorrow and murmured protestations of the sacrifice her love would readily make for him she so dearly loved. Confused for the instant at the sight of Emily absorbed in such utter woe—for he could not imagine any satisfactory cause for it in the narration which Aziel had just given him—he stood regarding her with that respectful silence which the exhibition of grief always induces. Then, gently approaching her, he tenderly called her by name, and stood by her side with his eyes, full of love and sympathy, looking down upon her. She heard his

voice, but without that alertness of motion with which it had been her wont to respond to him down by the clustering willows and along the brook, where happy hours had fled too fast for them. Slowly and wearily she raised her head. Instead of the bright smile of welcome he had expected, he saw that shrinking, shy, saddened look—the same she had given him that other morning when he had said good-bye to her in the willow copse. Trembling with the apprehension that she had indeed ceased to love him, and that the forgiveness he had come to ask would not bring back her heart to him, he caught her hand and passionately exclaimed,

“Emily, speak to me! Do not look at me with that strange, terror-stricken gaze. I have come to ask you to forgive me—to hear you say that you still love me. See!” he went on as a smile of tender sadness crept over her face and he felt her hand, in which he had already placed the jewel, fluttering in his grasp; “here is the locket. I give it back to you with a love stronger and deeper and purer than when I first placed it in your hands. No, no! Do not turn away. Azriel has told me all. I know you love me, and Heaven is my witness that I love you more sincerely than my poor lips can express. Will you not believe me? What can I do to prove to you the depth of my repentance and the strength of my love?”

He stopped, his voice dying away in tremulous tones; for her tears had broken out afresh while he had been speaking, and her face had turned partly away from him with a despairing look, and her head sunk upon her bosom.

“Emily,” he cried in broken tones, falling upon his knees and drawing her nearer to him with his close-encircling arm, “do not say you will not forgive me, undeserving though I be. Let your heart speak truly, unworthy as I am to hear its blessed words. You do love me still? You remember all your promises and vows to me? You cannot, you will not, cease to love me?”

For answer she suddenly raised her face to his—a face in which he saw, despite its tears and shadows, her old look of childlike simplicity and truth. Then, as her eyes met his ardent gaze, which as quickly flashed with hope,

she sank into his arms with a murmured exclamation of joy, burying her head upon his shoulder.

"You love me, then, as much as ever?" he tenderly whispered, pressing a fervent kiss upon the tear-stained cheek lying so close to his lips.

"Dear Volney!" she softly breathed, as her little arm crept around his neck with a clinging pressure.

He could not speak; his heart was too full. Even thought could not formulate the happiness he felt, much less feeble words give expression to it. Life's most joyful moment was it for him, as it ever has been since love's first whisper was heard in Paradise. He loved and was beloved. Closer to his breast he drew the nestling form that so passively rested in his arms. With many a thrill he felt her soft breath upon his cheek. Glancing down with rapturous face, he drew in from her eyes, half veiled in happy tears, the look of trusting love she gave him as her lips again murmured his name. What joyous visions of their future were mirrored in her tender, trusting eyes!

"This is joy," he said with a fervent kiss, "the world cannot give and cannot take away. And always thus shall we love each other."

In response she gently touched his cheek with her half-parted lips, and then, with a little bashful start, hid her blushing, happy face on his breast, where she felt his strong heart beating for her—a heart so full of joy, so full of love, so full of hope, she knew it was; and his own precious letter, hidden in her bosom, seemed to palpitate in soft unison with the beatings of their happy hearts.

"It is very selfish in me," said Volney at last, looking down into her confiding face, turned up to his with the frank trustfulness of a child, "to be so absorbed in my own happiness at meeting you again, so loving and true to me as to forget even for a moment your troubles. But your misfortunes are, and always shall be, mine. You know how sorry I am at what has happened; yet if it gives me the opportunity to show you how devotedly I love you, I am sure we will both be happier in the end, whatever may be the result of last night's mystery."

"Do you think father has gone away to stay a long time?" she asked, her arms pressing closer upon his breast

with a little convulsive motion, as if this question had suddenly suggested to her that perhaps in some mysterious way she might lose Volney also, who seemed, she could not tell how or when, to have divided her heart with her absent parent.

"I cannot believe that it will be long before we see him again," he replied after a pause, during which his hand gently stroked the head so passively pillowed upon his shoulder. "We must be patient. Your father, you know, is such a very strange man; I never could understand his character or imagine any good reason why he has kept you so many years secluded from the world. His leaving you so mysteriously now is as unaccountable to me as the whole course of his life since he has been in Slowville. When such a man disappears in the way he has done, it is not so easy to trace him. Perhaps before the day is past," he went on more confidently, "I shall come across some clew to his whereabouts. If I do, you and I will follow it up without delay and find him. Ah, Emily! with you by my side, I could willingly wander the world over in search of anything, if the finding of it should bring only one smile of happiness to your loving eyes."

His face illumined by the proud consciousness of the eternal endurance of his affection, he kissed her lips, which turned not away as she murmured,

"I know you love me very, very much. Oh, if father were only here, I should be so happy!"

"Can you not be happy with me even if your father is not by your side?" he said with a faint touch of reproach in his voice. "You cannot have him always with you. The time must come when he will go a longer journey than he may be traveling now—when you will be left always with me—when, if you do not love me with all your heart, as even now I love you, I shall be very miserable and you will be as unhappy as myself. My little wife that is to be must love me so much that I shall always be first and foremost in her heart, leaving only a little corner there for her father. There, there! do not misunderstand me," he continued, speaking quickly and patting her cheek, down which tears were already fast falling, as her face had slowly drooped away from his fervent gaze.

"I was not finding fault with you; I am sure you love me far more than I deserve. I was only picturing to you our married life, when we will be so engrossed in our love for each other that affection for our parents will be only a secondary pleasure to us. And, darling little wife," pressing her to his breast, "much as I shall love you then, I know your love for me will be purer and holier than mine, strive though I may to equal you with the sincerest worship of my heart. You and I married!" he murmured—"husband and wife, never to part again, always to be together! The mere thought so fills my heart with joy that I cannot speak. What a transport of happiness the reality will be!"

He suddenly ceased speaking, for she was trembling and in tears. With a look of alarm he sought to catch a glimpse of her face, as if there he could read the cause of her agitation. She was sobbing and weeping violently as his hand gently turned her unresisting head, and her tear-stained face was for an instant exposed to his startled and questioning gaze. Tenderly he laid her head again upon his breast, touching her forehead with a lingering pressure of his lips. Poor child! he thought; he had been too abrupt. His excited description of their married life had aroused some strange fears in her innocent soul, made greater, perhaps, by the nervous condition of her mind. Yes, he ought to have approached the subject gradually, if at all at this time. But he would speak gently to her and soothe her.

"I am sorry," he said in a compassionate whisper, "that my eagerness in regard to our marriage has brought tears to my little wife's eyes. You will forgive me if my love outran my discretion. But it was natural for me to speak of our future happiness, for so bound up are you in my every thought that it seems as if you were already my wife without form or ceremony."

"Oh, it is not that—not that!" she wailed, her arms groping their way again around his neck. "I do love you—I do want to be your wife; but I cannot. No, no, I cannot! I love you too much to make you unhappy. But oh, I will love you ever so much more than I do now," she went on, clinging closer to him as her tears

came the faster. "No one shall ever love you so much as I will. I will think of you all day and pray for you all night—"

He quickly interrupted her, putting her out at arm's length with a startled motion. He gazed into her face with such a white, wild look that for the moment it checked her tears and held in suspense the distressed expression of her countenance.

"What is this you are saying?" he asked with such a tremor in his husky voice that she shrank just a trifle away from him. "You love me, and yet you cannot be my wife? Can it be possible," he went on, a reproachful look gathering in his eyes, so intently fixed upon her, "that you are trifling with me again, as I thought you did that morning I bid you good-bye. Oh, Emily, it cannot be that you are so cruel! No, no! You do not speak the words of your own heart," his tones softening as he saw her eager look of expostulation, followed so quickly by a yearning glance as steady as it was loving. "I am sure you love me. Every dear feature of your face tells me so. You *will* be my wife—mine for ever! But why," drawing her again to him and gazing reproachfully into her eyes, that were glistening with happy tears—"why have you talked so strangely of never becoming my wife? What reason is there that you should not marry me? Come! tell me who put these thoughts into your guileless mind? Are they echoes of your father's words still lingering there?"

"No, no!" she murmured, hesitatingly, catching her words now and then with a sob; "he never told me not to marry you for fear I should prevent you becoming a great and rich man. He only wanted me to wait," she went on, stammering and sobbing more freely, "until I was sure I—I loved you!"

"Are you sure of it now?" he asked, a smile of assurance flitting across his grave face.

"Yes; very, very sure," she answered with a gentle thrill of firmness in her voice as she hid her blushing cheek upon his shoulder with a shy but tender glance.

"Then, loving me so," he said, speaking with sudden deliberation in his kindly tone, "you will tell me who it

is that has been advising you not to marry me for my own sake. Was it my mother?" putting the question with that quickness with which it had just flashed upon his mind.

Emily did not answer him, but with a little start turned her face slowly away from his gaze. He felt her form nestle more closely upon his breast as a slight tremor ran over her. In another instant he saw that she was weeping again.

"There is no longer need for your tears," he said, a touch of assumed gayety in his voice, "if my mother's advice is the cause of them. So she is the one," he continued with sudden warmth, "that would come between us, now that your father is gone! She would show her love for her only son by trying to rob him of his wife! What an exhibition of a mother's affection! I thought your father was cruel to us, Emily, but what shall I say of my mother?" he exclaimed with bitterness, while indignation flamed in his eyes.

"You must not be angry with her," said the girl, looking up at him pleadingly. "She loves you very much—I am sure she does: she told me so; and it was only because she loves you that she asked me not to marry you."

"She asked you not to marry me!" he muttered, a confused expression of pain and shame on his face. "What reasons did she give you? Tell me everything she said. I can bear to hear it all, now that I know the effect of her cruel advice upon you has so soon passed away."

"Ought I to tell you all she said to me?" asked Emily, just a little uncertainty in the frank questioning of her face. "And if I do," coaxingly patting his cheek, "you will promise me not to be angry with her? She is your mother. I know she loves you. How could she help it?"

He could hardly repress a smile at the utter simplicity of her words and manner. But the smile soon deepened into a look of admiration and of love as he said with a light laugh,

"What an innocent, guileless soul you have, to be sure!

So my mother loves me! Let us hope she does. For your sake I will try not to be angry with her for what she has done, though it deeply wounds me. But you have not told me what she said to you. So go on, and omit nothing. Remember, the greatest love begets the fullest confidence. I always want your heart to be freely opened to me, as mine shall ever be to you."

She went on now, and told him the conversation in all its details. She could not remember so well what reply she had given to his mother, but what his mother had said to her—this she repeated almost word for word, as her love had treasured it up because it so deeply affected the happiness of him for whom she was more than willing to sacrifice all joy of her own. When she had finished the recital, he remained for a moment in silence, trying to repress all exhibitions of the anger he felt, although, despite his efforts, his eyes shone wrathfully, his brows lowered and there were set lines about his rigid lips.

"You promised me not to be angry," she whispered, soothingly putting up her shapely hand and smoothing out the frown still heavy upon his brow. "You must not look so worried and sad. I will love you just as much as you want me to."

"You loving, unsuspecting child!" he said at length as he folded her to his breast. "How can I ever prove worthy of your pure devotion. What joy it will be for me to make your happiness the one great aim of my life! Ah! what would fortune or fame be to me without you?—dearer than all the fortunes of the world, sweeter far than fame's most noble gifts. No, darling; all that the world could give me would be but the merest dross and I the poorest beggar on earth were you not my wife. But," checking himself and his old grave look returning, "my love for you must now show itself in action rather than in words. This, darling, is no place for you to stay any longer than is necessary. I know my mother's unrelenting disposition. As long as you are under this roof she will give you neither peace nor rest, especially when she finds that her talk with you has been of no avail to separate us."

"But where can I go?" was the wondering question.

Then, with an earnest look out of her clear blue eyes, she added, as she saw how he hesitated to reply, "I will go anywhere with you."

"Let us see what the day will bring forth," he replied. "If I find a trace of your father, you shall go with me in search of him. While I am gone this morning you had better stay here in this room and rest, and recover as much as you can from that ugly wound, which I see Aziel has so carefully dressed. Ah! Aziel is the woman who should have been my mother," he sighed. "She fairly worships me, and she will have as much affection for you as she has for me, now that she knows how I love you. I will leave you in her charge. You need not fear my mother. I will see to it that she does not again speak to you on this subject."

Giving her a parting embrace, he went slowly toward the door, turning at each step with a loving glance in her direction.

"Shall I keep the locket?" she called softly after him, with a happy smile holding out the jewel, which all this while had been nestling in her bosom beside the letter.

"Keep it, and with it the only and dearest love of my heart," he exclaimed passionately, throwing back a kiss as he disappeared through the door.

As he passed along the hall he stopped at his mother's door and listened. He heard her walking with slow and measured steps backward and forward across her apartment.

Opening the door with a slight rap, he entered her room, and stood silently regarding her; for as soon as her eyes had fallen upon him she stopped where she was and gazed coldly at him, with no other reception than a slight haughty inclination of her head.

"Mother," he said, advancing slowly and hesitatingly extending his hand, "is this all the welcome you have for me, when I have come back to tell you of my success?"

"What other welcome do you deserve?" she replied, not touching the proffered palm and proudly drawing herself away with folded hands. "When a son returns to his mother's house, and first selfishly seeks an unknown girl and lavishes upon her his fresh and loving greetings,

what reception other than this should his mother give to his tardy appearance? Strange that you came here at all! I wonder that you had not wholly forgotten me in your devotion to that beggar's brat," she added with mingled sarcasm and resentment in her steady tones.

"You must not taunt me," he exclaimed in a tremulous voice and with a warning gesture of his uplifted hand. "I cannot, I will not, bear it. You have done enough this morning to show how little you love me. You tried to separate my wife from me. You must not now add insult to injury."

"Injury!" The word came with a prolonged sneer. "You don't know the meaning of the word if you call my advice to that foolish, ignorant girl an injury to you. So you already call her your wife! What an excellent helpmeet for you she will be! She has such ripe judgment and good common sense. She has shown both of these to a remarkable degree in so soon betraying my confidence and setting you against your own mother. A model wife, indeed, if deceit be a woman's charm!"

The hot, angry blood surged through his cheeks and flushed deep-red on his temples. His whole form vibrated with an intensity of passion that showed itself in the swift, vindictive look of his face, the quick swaying of his body and the convulsive clutching of his hands. But he suddenly controlled himself with a violent effort of his will, and for an instant stood rigid as a statue. Then, turning slowly away, he walked with a staggering motion over to the window. Here, with his hands firmly clasping the ledge, he looked out upon the landscape and the sky, and breathing heavily tried to forget for the moment where he was and what had been said to him. A white look of terror came over his face while he gazed, as if he were now just conscious that in his blinding passion he had barely escaped some awful peril—some dreadful undefined thing he might have done in word or deed. He remembered, too, with a shudder, that several times in his life he had experienced these same wicked feelings toward his mother, and that very often his father had even more quickly aroused them in his boyish breast.

"You ought to have struck me," resumed his mother,

calmly. "You would have been so like your father then, and your blow could not have hurt my body more than your words have already bruised my heart. Words, Volney, are keener than blows. Neglect is often harder to bear than death itself."

"You are my mother," he said, hoarsely, his eyes still fixed without. "I forgive you. But I cannot stay here longer," groping his way toward the door and casting back at her a look of fear. "An awful feeling of repulsion has come over me. It tells me that your heart and mine are still strangers to each other, as they have always been. Several times before in my life have I felt this dreadful sensation of utter hatred toward you when you and I have been angry with each other. What this feeling means or whence it comes, I do not know. God grant that I was not born with so terrible a legacy!"

When he had gone and his unsteady steps had descended the stairs, his mother said, half aloud, to herself,

"Very like his father he looked—so defiant and revengeful! It only needed a blow to complete the resemblance. How strange it is that, although he is my son, I have never been able to love him as a mother should! Heaven knows I have tried my best to do so; but all my efforts have been in vain. Ah! well do I remember that night when they laid him, a tiny babe, upon my arm, how I turned from him and bade the nurse carry him out of my sight. They told me of it afterward, and said it was delirium. Strange delirium it was, to last all these years—a delirium that has always kept mother and child so far apart!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

DIBBS ARRIVES AT CONCLUSIONS.

BILL DIBBS had had very bad dreams all night long. He had dreamed of murders, suicides and robberies, as if all the crimes he had read of in the sporting papers were passing before him in one continuous pantomimic

vision. Now, as he finally awoke and found himself sitting bolt upright in bed, his own hand clutched upon his throat, after he had dreamed that the grasp of a masked villain was choking his last breath, he gave a great sigh of relief and leaped to the floor. Gathering up his scattered apparel, he dressed himself in silence with more than his ordinary haste, and with a countenance of unusual gravity.

"William my boy," he said at last, in a tragic voice and with an ominous shake of his head, as he took a parting survey of his red-and-black eye in the cracked glass, "knowest thou not that the turgid dreams which have this night disturbed the placid surface of thy imagination are but the forms and shadows of events to come? Ay, presentiments, suggestions, prophecies of impending evil, engraven on thy leaden brain by the heavy touch of evil spirits that hovered over thy unconscious cerebellum in the darkness. 'Tis even so, my lord; and let us hence, to await the signal of alarm that even now trembles on the morning air."

He rolled his eyes with a theatrical stare in the direction of the window, and then descended with light, long strides to the bar-room. Here, suddenly changing his manner, he whistled a merry good-morning to Spike, threw back the shutters and opened the door, from which he looked with a glance of disdain on the still sleeping town.

"Sleep on, ye grovelings!" he muttered with a scornful wave of his hand. "Let the precious hours of waking dawn go heedless by, and blame Fortune for your poverty. Ye clods of the valley! Bah! to eat, to wag your tongues, to sleep,—this is all there is in life to you, ye hewers of wood and drawers of water!"

He turned to answer a dolorous whistle from Spike, when his eye caught sight of a solitary vehicle coming rapidly up the road from the direction of the miser's hut.

"Ah! Do my optics practice deception upon my unquiet soul, or do I behold yon rustie driving furiously apace, as if he were the bearer of ill tidings the rising sun would blush to hear?" and shading his eyes with his hand, he planted one foot firmly in advance of the other and

bent forward, gazing steadily at the approaching wagon in this dramatic position.

"I say, Dibbs!" cried the driver when he had come within hailing-distance. "The devil has broke loose this morning!"

"Is this thy sole message after this unseemly haste, my rural friend?" replied the deep voice of Dibbs as he slowly raised his hand with a contemptuous gesture that was reflected in the curl of his lip. "Knowest thou not that the gentleman to whom you so familiarly allude has been meandering unrestrained through the world's wide domain ever since the day of Adam's unfortunate complications with his matrimonial partner? Prithee, toiler at the spade, hadst thou told me the devil were bound, then would I indeed have welcomed thee as a blessed messenger from heaven's ærial vaults."

The driver, although he had halted his wagon, made no movement to leave it. He sat speechless, with the reins in his listless hands, and gazed with a bewildered, half-frightened look at the young man, just as he would have done at one he thought insane, and Dibbs returned his gaze with a steady glance, sharp and penetrating, such as he had often seen Rader Craft employ to confound a witness.

"What's the matter with you?" gasped the man, who was noted throughout Slowville for the feebleness of his mind.

Then, turning warily in his seat, he picked up the reins with a slow secret motion, and the next instant yelled frantically for his horse to speed away.

"Halt, spirit of the morning air!" said Dibbs in sonorous tones as he caught the gaunt head of the still gaunter horse, which as yet had made no effort to move. "Ere thy fleet limbs can convey thy master hence he must divulge the meaning of his mysterious words.—Friend of the arable soil," addressing the trembling driver, "open with quick expansion thy parched lips, and tell me in what particular locality thou hast this morning beheld the devil in his customary looseness. Speak, vassal! What hast thy dull eyes seen to so affright thine ignoble soul? What is it thou wouldst tell me,

simple wanderer in pastures green? Speak, if thou wouldst prolong thine inoffensive life!"

"The miser's run away with his gold, his niece was found dead in the road last night, and the grave in the garden is open to the bottom and there is nothing in it!" the man exclaimed with chattering teeth.

"What! Sayest thou so? Then get thee gone, thou ill-omened messenger of darkness!" cried Dibbs, giving the horse a fierce poke in the ribs that made him leap forward, throwing the driver heels over head into the back of the wagon, which now dashed away madly along the village street, with the wild cries of the overturned and frightened occupant sounding above the rattling of the wheels.

"Ay, 'tis well for my most noble purpose that thy panting jade doth bear thee so swiftly from the confines of this curious town," muttered Dibbs as the vehicle disappeared with unslackened speed over the brow of the hill. "Ere these sleeping gossips awake to hear thy villainous news I myself shall have probed it to truth's clearest bottom; and where concealment best will serve me, there will I hang upon my tongue the dead weight of cunning silence."

Thrusting his hand into the depths of his hair with a muttered "Ha! ha!" he strode into the bar-room, casting behind him a comprehensive look of disgust at the still unaroused village. For a moment he stood immovable in the centre of the room, his arms folded, his eyes fixed upon the floor, and his heavy brows knitted in a portentous frown. With labored breathing he walked with measured step behind the bar and seized his hat and a stout cane. Shaking his head mysteriously at Spike, who was imitating the frightened cries of the man in the runaway wagon, Dibbs said in guttural tones,

"Spike, there is horrible news abroad! Cease thy festive imitations of Nature's lamentations. Silence thy unseemly joy; for, in the words of the celestial William, 'Thy father's beard is turned white with the news: you may buy' the miser's 'land now as cheap as stinking mackerel.'"

Going to the door at the rear of the bar, he flung it

open, and with a frightful yell of "Bar, Mrs. Boozer! bar!" slammed it shut again, and exclaiming, "On, most noble youth, with lightning swiftness to the miser's domain!" darted from the house and ran fleetly down the road, his thoughts not less active in suspicions than were his limbs quick to bear him hence.

When, in a very short time, Dibbs had left the village far behind him, and his eager eyes had caught sight of Nicholas Grundle's hut, he came to a sudden halt. Laying his hands upon his panting sides, he saw a cart in front of the miser's door, and two men rapidly loading it with the furniture they were hastily dragging out from the cottage.

"My Milesian friend of the hardened fist, and his prospective father-in-law," he muttered as his keen gaze recognized the parties. "But by whose authority are they thus possessing themselves of the miser's personalty? The plot thickens. I will continue my observations at a distance. When in doubt, whether in physics or in morals, take to the woods."

He crept swiftly over the rail fence, and crouching, made his way stealthily through the underbrush. At last he hid himself behind a fallen tree. Here, with his eyes raised just high enough for effective vision, he watched the men, who were in full view, and only a little way off from his safe hiding-place.

It was not long before he saw, with great relief to both his constrained position and impatient thoughts, the loading completed, the cow tied to the cart, and the vehicle driven slowly away by the men in the direction of the farm-house. As the group receded farther up the road he raised himself upon his knees and kept the cart in sight until he saw it turn into the lane and finally come to a halt in front of the farm-house door. Then, with a resolute leap, Dibbs sprang to his feet, and running across the clearing was in the miser's hut in a few moments. His heart was beating boldly in spite of his white face and startled eyes; for a passing glance had shown him that the housekeeper's grave was not disturbed. He had not her risen ghost to interfere with the investigations he immediately began to make.

With a reassuring shrug of his shoulders and a tighter grip upon his cane, he peered cautiously around the deserted room. The first thing upon which his wary glance fell was the broken valise, and near it the pile of round packages in paper. In an instant he recognized the valise. Bending over it, he emitted a long, low whistle, while his eyes rolled rapidly with a look of mingled surprise and cunning. But he said nothing, only shook his head wisely. Turning the valise slowly over, the letters "J. L. A." caught his eye.

"An *alias*!" he ejaculated as he laid his finger with a little exultant smile on the side of his nose and whistled more softly as he winked. He stooped, picked up one of the bundles, and slowly unwrapped it. When he saw it contained only a common stone, he gave no evidence of surprise, but kept on winking and whistling, the look of shrewdness deepening on his face all the while. When he had silently unrolled a few of the parcels and found stones within, he tossed those he had unwrapped out of the window one by one. The remainder he put into the valise, fixing its shattered sides together as well as he could. Without a word he carried the valise quickly into the back yard, where he dropped it into an old well, and saw it sink out of sight. Silently watching the spot where it had disappeared until his broad grin was reflected from the quiet surface of the water, Dibbs returned to the house. With his face radiant with the conclusions this discovery had brought him, he resumed his examination of the premises. He hunted through every room for some corroborative trace of what he suspected, opening every closet and prying into every corner. But nothing rewarded his search. The rooms and closets were as bare as if the house had never been occupied, so completely had the men cleared it of its contents.

Dibbs found a piece of a candle on the floor. This he lighted, and after a moment's hesitation descended to the cellar, holding the light in front of him, swiftly swaying his cane right and left, and all the while loudly calling on several imaginary companions to follow him. A quick, cautious glance around this apartment, so dark and damp and still, told him he had nothing to fear. The

miser was not here, guarding his treasure with dog and gun—if treasure there had been here or were now. Dibbs flared the candle over his head and listened. He heard no sounds save those of his own heavy breathing and the throbbing of his heart. The breathing and throbbing were loud just now; for courageous as Dibbs was under all other circumstances, he could not endure darkness or the smell of damp earth. They were too suggestive to him of death and the grave. Trying to shake off his superstitious fears with a laugh, which was very faint and hollow, he advanced farther into the cellar and began a rapid survey of its contents. He peered into barrels and boxes, throwing them down and turning them over, but each and all of them he found contained only the merest trash and refuse. He had almost given up the idea of finding any foundation for his suspicion that here was the hiding-place of the miser's money when his eye caught sight of the hole in the wall.

Darting over to it, Dibbs thrust in his arm, and examined every inch of the cavity. But as he at length drew out his empty hand there was no look of disappointment on his face—rather, instead, the confident, comprehensive smile with which he had regarded the valise when his eyes had first fallen upon it this morning. He ascended the stairs quickly, flung the candle in the fireplace, and went to the barn. All over this he hunted carefully, through stalls and bins and mows, and then, as if more than satisfied with the result of his labors, sought the road. Here, standing in deep and silent meditation for some time, his puzzled face grew clear again, and he bent his steps rapidly in the direction of the farm-house. Here he might pick up the missing links in his chain of evidence.

He had not proceeded far on his way before he met Dennis O'Hara, from whom he soon learned all the particulars of which that loquacious individual was possessed concerning the miser's departure and what had befallen Emily.

"A very improbable tale!" exclaimed Dibbs with a doubtful shake of his head as the man finished his account, considerably enlarged by his superstitious imagi-

nation. "And let me advise you to keep it to yourself. If Rader Craft gets hold of your story, you will find yourself clapped into jail before night as a very important witness in the case for the Commonwealth; for according to your tale, the miser has been murdered and his body spirited away, as well as his gold."

"Shure, is it in the dhirty jail they would put me fur tellin' the thruth, do you say, Mr. Dibbs?" asked O'Hara, his voice quaking.

"Even so, my nimble-tongued Milesian. The cause of justice invariably demands the incarceration of the principal witness to a capital crime. But if you hold your tongue fast, and know nothing about this affair, you will be safe. You know it is best sometimes for a man to be dumb. Eh?"

"Throth, I do! An' it's not a word out o' me tight lips they'll get, no more nor out o' me horse, bedad! Be jabers, he can tell them more than I know, at all, at all—the dhirty blackguards, thim lawyers, tryin' to git an honest man in jail, bad 'cess to thim!"

O'Hara shook his fist vigorously at the village courthouse, visible on the distant hill.

"Hold to those sentiments, and you will keep out of trouble. Good luck to your silence! Don't let your wife break it with a broomstick. I must be going."

Dibbs turned away and continued his walk toward the farm-house. But when O'Hara, shaking his head and fist by turns, had passed out of sight at the bend of the road, Dibbs seated himself with an air of important deliberation beneath a tree by the wayside and gave himself up to deep cogitation, holding his head tightly clasped between his two hands, as was the lawyer's custom when studying a knotty question. For a long time Dibbs remained thus motionless and speechless, his brows alternately knitting and relaxing, his face now covered with perplexing frowns and anon lighted up with quick smiles of apprehension. Turn over the case as he would, and view it in all the different lights of his keen analysis of the facts, he could not arrive with perfect clearness at the conclusions he sought to establish, which were that Nicholas Grundle had been robbed by the mysterious stranger, and that the miser's disap-

pearance was in some way connected with the robbery. How to reconcile these two conclusions was the question that puzzled him. He raised his head at last with a serene smile, and looked at a heap of stones alongside of him with judicial gravity.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said with a preliminary cough, bowing sternly in the direction of the stones, "you have heard the facts presented by the Commonwealth in this case with all the lucidity of clearness for which our most eminent and learned district attorney is so conspicuously distinguished. It now remains for me, sitting as judge in this important trial, to furnish to your limited understandings the principles of law by which you shall judge of these facts and properly apply them in the consideration of your verdict.

"At the outset of my charge I would impress upon your diminutive intellects the principles of evidence by which you are to be guided as laid down by that most eminent authority on the law of evidence, the Honorable Thomas Starkie, Esq. What says the most noble Starkie? I quote his language literally, committed to memory but a day since in the office of that wily practitioner, Rader Craft, Esq., who knows more tortuous and belated law than is good for his conscience—if he have any—or the peace of this community. Starkie says:

"Where knowledge cannot be acquired by means of actual and personal observation, there are but two modes by which the existence of a bygone fact can be ascertained.

"Firstly. By information derived either immediately or mediately from those who had actual knowledge of the fact; or,

"Secondly. By means of inferences or conclusions drawn from other facts connected with the principal fact which can be sufficiently established.

"All evidence thus derived, whether immediately or mediately, from such as have had, or are supposed to have had, actual knowledge of the fact, may not improperly be termed *direct* evidence; whilst that which is derived merely from collateral circumstances may be termed *indirect* or *inferential* evidence.'

“Keeping these two methods of procedure as distinct as possible in your feeble comprehensions, let us proceed to apply them to the present issue.

“*Ab initio*, it is evident that the Commonwealth has signally failed to establish by the aforesaid first method the first count in its indictment against the defendant, Seth Slade—namely, that of murder. For, beyond the cry of help from the supposed victim, testified to by his daughter, who was not even an eye-witness to the deadly struggle which the Commonwealth avers took place, there has not been a particle of evidence submitted to establish the theory of such a capital crime as here charged having been committed, while, on the contrary, there is the strongest indirect evidence against it.

“The body of the supposititious murdered man has not been found, nor has the most careful examination of the premises of Nicholas Grundle given any indications that such a calamity did befall him.

“Dismissing, then, this first and unsustained count in the indictment, let us proceed to the next, which charges the defendant, Seth Slade, with the robbery of the aforesaid Grundle.

“Without going through in detail the admirably succinct testimony of our esteemed fellow-townsmen, William Dibbs, Esq., it must be apparent to your most obtuse intelligences that the charge of robbery against the defendant has been more than sustained. All the circumstances, direct and indirect, point inevitably to such a conclusion, whether we consider the midnight visitations of Seth Slade to the miser’s cottage, or the mysterious and dangerous character of the said Slade, or the evidence he left behind of the manner in which he gained his victim’s confidence; for that valise filled with stones, gentlemen, clearly indicates a deception practiced for sinister motives. As our Roman ancestors would observe, *Suppressio veri, suggestio falsi*, which our classical attorney, Rader Craft, Esq., would liberally translate thus: ‘He who deceives is also false to all the noble elements of our nature.’

“And now, gentlemen of the jury, our worthy witness, William Dibbs, Esq., having clearly shown that the

defendant was a stranger to Nicholas Grundle, his being seen at the miser's cottage in the dead hour of the night is invulnerable proof that the said Slade was not there from motives of friendship; and the unsocial character of the miser also precludes the idea that the defendant might have been an invited, or even tolerated, guest.

"No, gentlemen. Seth Slade is a robber of the deepest dye; for, violating the sanctity of hospitality, he first overcame his victim by personal violence, as the cry for help attests, and then, while the poor old man lay stretched helpless upon the floor, the unconscionable villain descended with swift feet to the cellar, laid his surreptitious hands upon the miser's treasure, and fled with it under the cover of darkness.

"Does the Commonwealth attempt to rebut this indirect evidence, so cumulative, by the mere assertion that if Nicholas Grundle had been robbed he would be here to-day to tell us the tale and method of his misfortune? On the contrary, would not his uncommunicative nature make him keep his secret and himself devise some way to regain his stolen property without, by publicity, letting it fall a spoil to lawyers and detectives? Is it improbable—nay, is it not probable—that as soon as Nicholas Grundle discovered his loss he started in pursuit of the thief, and is this very moment bending all his cunning faculties to the search? What other reason than this would lead the miser to desert his daughter, for whom, as we all know, he had an affection that amounted to insanity, so closely did he guard her from intercourse with the outer world—so jealous of his child indeed—as has been abundantly testified—that she must hear no other voice than his wakening the sad solitudes of her secluded life?

"No, gentlemen, it is preposterous to suppose that Nicholas Grundle went away willingly with the man who robbed him, and equally untenable is the proposition that for any reason beyond the attempt to recover his property he so suddenly deserted a child to whom he had devoted every moment of his life since first he came within the limits of this village, now sleeping so soundly on yonder hill, gleaming in the risen sun. Such, then, I see, is your verdict—the defendant guilty of robbery. You need not

formally announce your finding. I will immediately enter it on record and dismiss you from further consideration of this case. If it is objected by some of you that I have transcended my powers as a judge by myself trying and deciding the case without your assistance, it may be well for you to know that I act thus not only from inclination, but by precedent as well. It is the province as well as the honorable distinction of gigantic intellects to assume extra-judicial powers for the public good."

With a dismissing wave of his hand he arose from his seat, and walking a few steps with haughty dignity hurried on to the farm-house. The only indication he gave of the course he intended to pursue in this matter, which he felt he had examined in all its legal aspects, was an energetic soliloquy as he turned into the lane.

"Seth Slade," he said with hoarse and measured accents, "before the morning's dawn you will have Bill Dibbs upon your track; and if the miser cometh down handsomely with the ducats, I shall submit you to his tender mercy. Ah ha! boast not thyself of safety! I have no fear of losing either you or the treasure. But where to find the miser? Well, I'll get a clew to him before the day has passed. Now," with a heavy sigh as he drew near the house, "to lift the weight of dread suspicion from the lovely heart of beauteous Aziel. Little her waiting, dreading soul imagines the soothing balm I bear her! How her heavenly bosom will heave with joy's most sudden transport when my lips assure her that no more need she fear the visits of the obnoxious stranger!"

Unobserved, Dibbs crept cautiously to the rear of the house, and peeped through the kitchen-window with his uninjured eye. Aziel, who was alone, saw him, and laying her finger on her lips stepped softly to the door, and opened it with a smile of welcome which quickly gave way to a questioning look of fear.

"The girl is safe?" asked Dibbs in a whisper, his face suddenly growing scarlet under her earnest though friendly gaze.

"Yes," Aziel replied; "but what news have you? Has anything been discovered?"

"Calm the tumult of thy soul," he rejoined, throwing

a deep meaning into his low voice. "No longer need you fear the return of the mysterious stranger. These precincts he will never willingly tread again. Last night's was his final visit *in this locality*, or I was not born a prophet. I am here to tell you this, and to bid you good-bye. Some future time you may better understand my meaning in regard to the movements of *Seth Slade*. For the present know that the miser's treasure was more certain to the aforesaid Slade than Gagger's generosity, more desirable to him than even keeping you two women in constant terror. Again I say, 'Farewell!' If you should ever need a friend, write to yours truly, William Dibbs, Philadelphia."

"Are you going away very soon?" she asked, trying to conceal the agitation which his mention of Seth Slade's name as well as his strange explanation of recent events had caused. "Can you not wait till we know more about what really happened last night? You certainly are aware how much we need your friendship. Pardon me, but I have been so interested in your words that I have forgotten to apologize for the rudeness with which Patrick treated you. I hope your eye was not seriously injured?"

"The lawyer settled this claim for damages," said Dibbs with a droll wink, pointing to the injured member, "so we will dismiss further consideration of it. Yes, I must speedily depart from Slowville. Delays are dangerous, and this is not the field for investigation. Believe me, my protecting care is no longer necessary to your welfare. One word of warning, and I am done. Beware of the lawyer! Neither you nor Mrs. Gagger will longer need his services or friendship. Last night the exigence for these ceased to exist. The robbery of Nicholas Grundle may be the miser's loss, but it is your gain. Good-bye!"

He caught Aziel's hand in his vehement grasp and kissed it with a fervor that half amused and half startled her. He let it go as quickly as he had seized it, and in another instant had turned silently away, striding slowly around the corner of the house. As he went his eyes fell upon a little bunch of red roses lying on the ground. He recognized them with a faint start of joy.

"Mrs. Boozer's flowers!" he exclaimed under his breath. "Little she dreamed, when she pinned them on the lawyer's noble breast, that he would give them to Aziel as a token of his love. But I will tell the too trusting Boozer of his perfidy. Yes, her innocent heart shall this very day know the depth of Rader Craft's deception."

Dibbs quickened his pace down the lane, and was congratulating himself that he had escaped meeting Patrick Doyle, when he heard the voice of that individual calling to him from behind the fence at the rear of the barn-yard.

"The top o' the mornin' to ye, Misther Tibbs!" cried Doyle with a bantering flourish of his hand. "Is it seein' much ye are out o' yer widdered eye? For, troth, I can see it's as black as a widder's crape."

"No, I don't see very well, child of the bog! I thought your head was a pumpkin or a cabbage sitting on the fence," yelled back Dibbs, keeping on his way.

"Be jabers, it's very blind ye are; but the more ye sees, the less ye knows, bedad. Shure, it's loike one o' yer own whiskey-bottles ye are—the liss there's in ye, the more powerful sound ye make, ye chatin' vagabond, that never yit sold a pure dhrop o' the crathur!"

Dibbs was by this time beyond the reach of the Irishman's voice, and striding rapidly along the main road. Before he reached the miser's hut he left the thoroughfare and continued his way across the fields to the village. He did not enter the town, but making a circuit of it arrived at the dépôt, and there sought out the man who had been on watch the previous night. From this official, after cautious questioning, Dibbs learned that at about five o'clock that morning a very old man with a savage-looking dog had come by himself to the dépôt and begged a ride on a freight-train just about starting east.

"Did you put him aboard the train?" asked Dibbs.

"Oh yes; he begged and cried so, saying it was a case of life and death with him, that I let him and his dog get into an empty box-car, and off they went."

"Humph!" muttered Dibbs, turning indifferently away; "some old tramp on his travels, I suspect. The tears lie mighty near a fraud's eyes. Well, it was a good thing you passed him on. Slowville can't afford to feed tramps and

run the poor-house too. Was the dog a black-and-white mastiff with cropped ears and a stub tail?"

"Yes; but come, now, how did you know anything about that dog?" queried the man with a suspicious look.

"In the language of the sarcastic levity of the beautiful Beatrice, I reply," said Dibbs with a sly wink, "'I have a good eye, uncle. I can see a church by daylight.'"

Before the watchman could answer, Dibbs had leaped from the platform and was on a brisk walk to the town.

"The last missing link of my bright chain of suspicion has been found," muttered Dibbs, smothering his triumphant laugh, as he stole along the street toward the inn. "Ah ha! I knew it! Nicholas Grundle awoke from his deadly stupor to find himself robbed. He wasted no precious time in bewailing his loss. With instant cunning he found some clew that pointed to the direction his despoiler had taken. He hastened in pursuit of him. Philadelphia was the objective-point of pursuer and pursued. The robber and his victim sped over the same track, but the express carried the one, and the freight the other—the fox and the goose, the hare and the tortoise. But the goose shall pluck the fox by the ears, and the tortoise shall catch the hare. Thus saith William Dibbs, who will bring to pass his individual prophecy by his personal presence in the city of Philadelphia. *When shall I go?* 'This very night!' my energetic and enthusiastic soul responds. In the words of Rader Craft, that embodiment of legal lore, 'Why should I longer delay? Nor will I.'"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE TALE OF THE ROSES.

WHEN Dibbs entered the bar-room of the Green Tree Inn, he was not surprised at—in fact, he was anticipating—the very reception with which Mrs. Boozer saluted him.

"Well, this is high carryings-on! You gadding all

over the country and leaving my business to take care of itself!" exclaimed that irate female, standing behind the bar, her arms akimbo and flaring her indignant eyes on him.

"Madam," replied Dibbs, removing his hat with a dignified salute and throwing back his head with a proud gesture, "allow me to observe that the violence of your manner is equaled by the inaccuracy of your grammar. Only when used in the collective sense are plural nouns entitled to a singular predicate—"

"Come!" she angrily interrupted, striding from behind the bar with a threatening flourish of her arm; "I don't want to hear any of your grammar. I pay you for your time, and I have a right to know how you spend it. Where have you been these three mortal hours? That's the question. Been up to the miser's hut with the rest of the fools, I suppose. As if it was any of your business what has become of the old skinflint!"

"Mrs. Boozer," said Dibbs, still preserving his dignified attitude and waving his hand with a conciliatory motion, "before proceeding farther in this conversation, which promises to become very interesting ere it be concluded, I tender you, with my profound respect, my resignation, to take effect at daylight this morning."

Mrs. Boozer's anger gave way to astonishment.

"You don't mean to say you ain't going to 'tend my bar any more? Why, it was only last night you said you would stay on another year."

"Madam, in the words of our mutual friend, the lawyer, *Tempora mutantur, et nos mutamur in illis*—the times are changed, and we are changed with them. To alter one's determination is not so much an evidence of inconsistency as it is an indication of a maturer and more enlightened deliberation. As Major Allechin, of the *Patriot*, would say, I print, but do not stereotype, my opinions. There is continually going on here," tapping his forehead significantly, "an unconscious cerebral progress, so that William Dibbs is wiser on awakening in the morning than when he went to sleep. True it is that I am resolved no longer to be your servant in a fiduciary capacity. But although from this hour I have ceased to elevate yonder

bottles for your pecuniary benefit, I nevertheless shall ever bear within this bosom a grateful sense of obligations received at your generous hands, forgetting only how oft your clarion voice has unjustly accused me of a slothful performance of my manifold duties. Commercially, farewell, friend of my early youth!"

He advanced with a halting pace, slowly drawing one foot after the other with a scraping motion. He extended his hand, which she hesitatingly shook with a bewildered and half-amused air. His announcement of his intention to leave and the manner in which he had made it equally surprised and confused her, but she could not help smiling at his tragic airs.

"I am sorry you will not stay," she said, her manner more gentle, as Dibbs withdrew his hand and folding his arms regarded her in silence, "but I have been expecting this. I always thought there was more sense in you than you let on to have. I told Mr. Craft yesterday, when he was speaking to me about keeping you, that you would soon be flying off. I have noticed a long time, what with your reading all day and studying all night, that you were getting above your business. Dear me! I never knew it to fail. As soon as people get a little learning into their heads they ain't fit for hard work any more."

"Far be it from me," rejoined Dibbs with increasing animation, thrusting his left thumb into the arm-hole of his vest and his right hand gesticulating with rapid and graceful motions—"far be it from me to defend the indolence of those whose physical endeavors do not keep pace with their intellectual attainments. But, most noble madam, I claim to belong to a higher race of men. Learning is to me only the stepping-stone to progress. As the body itself, even in its simplest movements, cannot advance so much as a step without an intelligent direction of the muscular system, so neither can the highest results of labor in any sphere be attained without that mental discernment which comes only by that laborious development of the higher faculties of the mind which philosophers call wisdom. Simple learning may not make a man industrious—wisdom can, and will. And what does that wisdom which I have acquired in the methods you

so felicitously describe teach me? What says her voice, crying, not in the streets as of old, but in my individual auricular organs? She informs me that a higher sphere than vonder bar awaits me. Yes, there is a niche in the temple of fame awaiting my occupation. In that beckoning niche, be it small or great, William Dibbs will soon erect his corporosity by the exertions of his own hands, the strivings of his own genius, the elevating powers of his ever-expanding intellect. Mrs. Boozer, this very night, with no companion save Spike, shall I set out upon my journey to fame and fortune. The way may be long, but more firm shall be my each succeeding step; the way may be dark, but brighter shall glow my undaunted eyes; the way may be steep and stony and tortuous, leading through dangers and misfortunes, but all the more resolutely shall I keep on my course, until in that glorious niche I stand, rewarded at last for all my endeavors by hearing the sweet sound of Fame's trumpet ringing in my joyful ears. Most worthy woman, good-bye! And allow me to express the heartfelt wish that the Green Tree Inn may stand many years, a welcome to the weary traveler, and may Fortune's hand ever rest with favor on your angelic brow!"

Before he had ceased speaking the smiles had died out of his listener's face, and she was wiping a stray tear or two out of her eyes with the corner of her apron. Mrs. Boozer's tears were like the contents of the bottles on the bar—diluted to a considerable degree, but still retaining a recognizable trace of the genuine spirit.

"I am sorry you're going, William," she was saying, accompanying her words with a sniffle. "It leaves me in the lurch. I don't know who I can get to take your place. It's so hard to find honest people nowadays. Dear me! a lone woman has a hard lot in this world!"

"Yes, Mrs. Boozer, the female mind is naturally dependent. The ivy clings not more closely to the sturdy oak than does the heart of trusting woman seek sympathy and support in the tenderness and strength of the masculine embrace. But even here is danger greater to her than in her loneliness. She may find when too late that she has sacrificed her heart's dearest treasures on the altar of man's deceitfulness and selfishness. And if,

like yourself, she have fortune, let her beware of man's seductive smile, his flattering words, his devoted attentions, or she will discover ere the honeymoon be over that it was her fortune that he wooed, her possessions that he sought, her well-filled purse that he smiled upon."

"I declare, how much you talk like Mr. Craft!" she said with just a visible blush overspreading her broad face, that beamed with admiration. "He'll be very sorry to have you go away. You know he thinks a great deal of you. He was loud in his praises of you yesterday."

"Was he?" sneered Dibbs, slowly curling his lip and snapping his finger contemptuously over his shoulder. "That for his praise!" and with another and louder snap, "That for his friendship!"

"Why, William, how can you speak that way of the noblest man in all this town? I thought you were his friend. What has he done to you?"

"Nothing to me. But I were indeed base did I see him deceiving my best friend and not resent it with all the powers of my noble soul," said Dibbs, giving a stout blow upon his bosom with his open hand, and with a wrathful flash in his eyes, which now fastened themselves upon the face of the woman with a meaning gaze.

"Who is he deceiving?" she asked at length, her countenance taking slowly on a white, anxious look as his expression softened into a sympathetic glance.

"Mrs. Boozer," exclaimed Dibbs in a tremulous whisper, seizing her by the hand and putting his mouth close to her ear, "be not alarmed! Make no outcry, for your salvation depends upon your heeding my words. Beware of the lawyer! He is deceiving you. I have this morning seen the evidence of his treachery!"

"I do not believe you," she gasped, her face growing whiter and her body swaying to and fro in his arms, which he had thrown around her to prevent her falling.

"Madam, rouse yourself! This is no time or place to give way to your emotion. Here! be seated in this chair," pushing her into one near by. "Retain your self-possession until I bring you some reviving fluid that will put at least temporary vigor into your sinking soul."

"No, no!" she murmured, suddenly regaining somewhat of composure as she put out her hands beseechingly. "Go on and tell me what you know. And oh, William, speak the truth, even if it breaks my heart to hear it."

"Let your heart bend, my dear madam, but not break. Let it not, like the unyielding oak, be uprooted by the violence of the storm, but rather, like the graceful lily of the valley, bend its tender blossoms beneath the fury of the gale and smile again in the coming sunlight—"

"Oh, William, William, will you speak and tell me what the bad news is?" she interrupted with a wailing cry, burying her tear-streaming face in her hands and rocking her portly frame to and fro.

"In the identical language of the deceiver himself, 'Why should I longer delay? Nor will I.' Mrs. Boozer, yesterday you pinned upon the lawyer's breast three flowers—red roses, love's truest language, typical, doubtless, of your love, faith and devotion. Where are those flowers now, that on yonder bush wept without woe and blushed without a crime in dewy splendor? Are they imparting to the lawyer's heart the peace of love assured, or are they blushing unseen and wasting their fragrance on the desert air? For answer, my dear madam, let your imagination follow me to the farm-house on the distant hill, where last night the lawyer wooed another heart than yours with the flowers you gave him. Ay, do not start, and I pray thee curb thine ire till a more fitting season, nor let thine anger go forth to wreak itself unjustly upon the innocent object of his treacherous affections. Though he gave these flowers, fresh with the dew of thy fondest affections, to Aziel Loyd, they were spurned by her even as she rejected his proffered love. This morning mine own eyes saw them lying neglected on their mother-earth, where she to whom he had given them had cast them with disdainful hand."

"Oh, the scoundrel! the viper!" almost shrieked Mrs. Boozer, her face no longer white, but reddening with fury and revenge; "he shall pay for this!"

"Call him an anaconda, my dear madam. The sting of a viper is feeble in comparison with the deadly hug of an anaconda," said Dibbs in a sympathetic tone; "and if

I can be of service to you in watching to-day the further movements of the aforesaid anaconda, I shall be pleased to keep an eye on his sinuous performances. In return for what I have already told you, I trust that you will keep secret the source of your information. You will not betray me, I believe."

"Indeed I won't, William. He shall never get any more secrets out of me. I'll fix him, though, you mark my words!"

As she left the bar-room, jerking her head high and working her fingers with convulsive clutches, Dibbs winked at Spike and smiled maliciously in the direction of the lawyer's office.

"Spike," he muttered, "the lawyer will in vain plead his own case in a very warm atmosphere before night."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DOYLE AGAIN AN ALLY.

THE words which Dibbs had spoken were a great relief for the moment to the harassed and overburdened mind of Aziel Loyd. Scarcely could a respite to the prisoner in his cell have sooner stayed his fears or awakened the hopes of ultimate escape from his threatening doom.

What, indeed, was she now, she thought as she stood leaning against the door where Dibbs had parted from her, or what had she been these many weary years, other than a prisoner of hope? With what longing eyes had she ever been looking from behind the bars of her bitter fate at joys she knew could never be her own, yet vaguely hoping for them still—joys that had been hers in those happy, fleeting days which memory ever treasured with a remorseless tenacity of recollection! Even now, despite all other thoughts, her mind carried her back, with quivering lip and glistening eye, to that time—too short, alas!—when life was perfect sunshine, its breath the perfume

of rarest flowers ; sweetest, dearest days of old, when love sighed in joy and wept in transport.

Though her tears fell fast, she could not forget the one pleasure that had illumined the dark, silent way along which she had walked. No, no ! She could not forget that one remaining treasure of her ruined life buried so deep a secret in her deserted heart. It had shone all these years with an ever-increasing lustre in the midst of her fears, her sorrows and her remorse. How well Aziel now remembered that the one only aim of her life had been to guard this treasure from all eyes save her own, to keep this secret until the grave should hide it with her ! And kept it she had, though it had cost her ceaseless torturing vigilance by day and by night, filling her soul at times with an agony which was denied even the relief of words or looks or tears. She had kept her secret, though often her bruised heart had cried aloud for her to reveal it. Patiently, faithfully, jealously, had she guarded it, sacredly consecrating her life to this one work, ever conscious that it was the only atonement she could make for the past, if atonement it could be. What if, after all this ceaseless struggle of twenty years, she were now to fail of success ? Suppose he who had returned from the ocean's silent deep should speak one word ? Oh what misery past all comprehension would come if he whose death had made her secret safe in her own keeping for all time should reveal it in some wild fit of revenge ! She shuddered at these dreadful thoughts, made all the more fearful by the vivid recollection of his threatening words in the woods that morning they were alone together. Over her sinking soul there stole that nameless dread of him which for seven years she had not known until she saw him standing the other night in yonder door, with his old evil look fastened upon her—a look in which she had so often read his threat to betray that secret which he knew she was in silence nurturing with her very heart's blood.

It was now that Dibbs' words came to Aziel with a wonderful power of assurance. In a flash of reviving hope they dispelled the horrible nightmare that was so rapidly settling down upon her soul. Why should she still so fear this man and what he might do, now that he had just

committed a crime that would prevent his coming again to this town for many a day? Yet, as she asked herself this question with a faint sigh of relief, the answer came, bringing to her face a doubting, half-frightened look. Ah! she knew far better than did Dibbs what a daring, unscrupulous man was this one with whom she had to deal. True, *she* had loved him in those other days, but always with a dread as strong upon her as her passionate affection. Afraid to come here again? Not he, if by coming he could further any wicked plan, though he were certain the officers of the law were dogging his very footsteps. No, she ought not trust for safety to so slim a hope as his fear of capture. Rather should she act—act on the supposition that he would return, this very night, perhaps, under the shelter of darkness. And if he should come?

This thought startled her, bringing back to her face the white, hunted look of old, when even his footsteps had been to her the signal of danger. If he should come to-night or to-morrow night, or any night, and speak those words which would make her more of an outcast in the world than she even now felt herself to be! Well—she smiled a little bitter, defiant smile—she could bear it. It would be only one more burden laid upon her heart, that had long since learned its life-lesson of patient endurance. But Volney—he whose heart had never known a sorrow? Oh, never, never upon him must fall the deadly blight of such a revelation! But what should she do? How could she avert so terrible a calamity? Should the man return this night, he would face his son, and Heaven only knew what angry scene between them might not disclose her secret. But Volney must not see him. No, no! They shall never meet if she can help it. And Volney? He must not this day have the slightest suspicion of his father's return excited by any hint as to the recent mysterious visit. Yes, against both such probabilities must she immediately guard with all the power of scheming she could summon to her aid. Her Volney in danger—his happiness threatened for life! Her boy, for whom she had suffered in secret as God and her own heart only knew! Her boy, whose first infant smile had been upon her breast—whose merry

laugh and joyous shout of childhood her ears had been the first to catch, and upon whose opening manhood she was now doting with hopes so fond and prayers so fervent! These thoughts, so suggestive of an evil she would have given her life to avert, startled her into instant action. She caught up her hood, and pulling it down over her face to conceal her agitated features ran to the barn in search of Doyle. She knew how invaluable his aid would be in furthering the plan her active mind had already conceived. For now, as it had ever been in all these years when her secret was in peril, she did not fail in immediately resolving upon some expedient of safety that promised well.

Suppressing all evidence of her emotion, she quietly entered the door of the barn. She stopped near the threshold, for in the middle of the floor, with his back to her, knelt Doyle, talking rapidly and excitedly to himself. Before him was a large open chest, into which he was peering with loud exclamations of curiosity and admiration.

"Shure, it's a dhry-goods sthore in a box," he was saying as he cautiously took up each article for closer inspection. "'Pon me sowl, thim dhresses are fit for a queen, so they are! Oh, look at the quality o' thim! Silk an' satin, be jabers! Well, well, well! Who would a-thought the owld faggot had these illigant clothes in his hut, wid the poor colleen dhressed loike a beggar, bad 'cess to him! Oh, bédad, here's a weddin'-veil an' the orange-flowers!" holding them up to view. "Widout the thrifle o' a smell, troth, these flowers are loike me grandmother's night-cap. Well, well, it's bothered I am entirely wid the sight. Wor it not for me own hands feelin' the same, I'd take me oath a leprechaun wor playin' decipshun wid me eyes. Troth, it's moighty queer, so it is! Blur an' agers!" he exclaimed excitedly as he gave himself a quick thrust in the ribs after a moment's silent scratching of his head; "I have it now thicker than the measles down at O'Hara's. 'Pon me sowl, it's an heiress the colleen is, an' these be her rightful clothes. Oh, bathershin! Patriek Doyle, ye wor dumb not to say that afore! Av coorse yer right, Mr. Doyle, for wance in yer life; an' it's plain as a pike-staff

now why the owld skinflint ran away from the colleen wid that sthrange man she was tellin' us of last noight. Shure, the man wor her father, an' it's the owld sthrap the miser that helped him stale the fortune o' the poor colleen, an' it's gone off togither they are to injoy it, the murtherin' vagabones!"

"So that is your conclusion, is it? And a very good one it is," spoke Aziel, with a little preliminary cough, as she came around in front of Doyle.

"Oh, blur an' agers!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet with a cry of genuine alarm and putting out his arms with a shielding motion; "I thought you wor a leprechaun!" Then, as he recognized her, he drew a long breath of relief, and said, with a sly look at the still open chest, "It wor gratifyin' me curiosity I wor, lookin' at thim illigant dhresses. Throth, it's an heiress the poor colleen is, wid thim foine clothes."

"Where did you get these?" asked the woman, looking into the chest with an amazed expression that was greatly relished by her companion. "Did you find this chest in Grundle's cottage?"

"The silf-same; an' there wor two trunks besides, for'ninst ye there, wid a lot o' men's clothes in thim," pointing to the pile of dilapidated furniture, beneath which a couple of old hair-covered trunks were half buried.

"I am not so very much surprised at this discovery," said Aziel, speaking to herself apparently, as she briefly examined the contents of the chest. "It only confirms my suspicions as to the mystery which has shrouded her life. These goods, though fresh in material, are very old in style, showing that the girl was in some way connected a long time ago with a family of station and fortune—"

"Bedad, I wor sayin' that same!" interrupted Pat with an emphatic shake of his head. "Faix, it's me book-oath I could take that thim two divil's limbs, the owld miser an' the black-whiskered vagabone, have run away wid her fortune. Oh, the dhirty thaves! It's dead as small beer an' stiff as a crutch I hope they both be this blissid minit!"

"Pat," said Aziel after a moment's silence, her eyes fixed on the chest and her face turned slightly away, "if Master

Volney should ask you about that strange man, I wish you would somehow be unable to describe him. It is best that Master Volney should not know anything about that man *in any way whatever*," emphasizing the words with a significant glance. "The girl has already forgotten how the man looked. You can forget him too, I am sure, when I tell you," her voice vibrating with an emotion she could not conceal, "that if you do so you will be doing both me and Master Volney the greatest service you could render us this side of the grave."

"Is it to sarve ye an' him ye be askin' me, Misthress Loyd, wid that sweet voice o' yours so sad? Oh, shure, it's meself that would go through fire an' wather to sarve ye both. It's iver remimberin' I am the kind words ye both spoke to me so often whin me own heart wor lonely in a sthrane land. Throth," dashing the tears from his eyes, "it wor mother an' sister, an' father an' brother, ye wor to me thin, whin me sowl wor brakin' fur the sound o' a frindly voice, an' me hand trimbled fur the tindher touch o' kindness."

"Yes, I remember it well—the morning you came here directly from the ship with your little bundle and black-thorn stick. You were very homesick. The tears glistened in your eyes then as they do now. Master Volney and I saw how much you needed sympathy and kindness. We gave them freely to you, but not one whit more freely than I know you will now give them to us!"

"Indade, it's God's own thruth ye be spakin' about me now. An' it's listenin' wid me two opin ears I am fur ye to give me the warnin' wurd that's to sarve ye both."

"If Master Volney," resumed Aziel with a grateful smile as she laid her hand with a confiding gesture on the Irishman's arm, "should ask you about this strange man, you will be sure not to know anything concerning him in any way—about his having been either here or at the miser's cottage. You understand?"

"Understhand, is it?" he returned with a gleam of native intelligence in his eyes. "Shure, yer manin' is plain as the sun above me head. Know him, would I? An' how would I know him? Faix," he continued with an odd

grin, drawing his sleeve across a face brimful of mischief, "lave me alone fur a bad mimory, Misthress Loyd. It's an inderstherous mind I have fur furgittin' things. Howld me now! Wor it the tin-peddler ye wor tellin' me to forgit the looks o', thin?" he asked with a grotesque wink; "fur, by the token o' me slapin' conscience, he be the only man I've clapped me two eyes on this week past. Indade, it's moighty lonely I've bin, seein' none o' me own sex hereabouts save Dennis O'Hara. God kape him safely, say I, till I git the marriage-promise from him, and he's not givin' it to me so aisy as he moight, long life to him!"

"I see you understand me," said Aziel, turning to go and fixing her earnest eyes on him with a look of speechless gratitude. "Oh, there is one thing more you could do to serve me: you could help me persuade Master Volney to go away with the girl immediately in search of this old man she thinks is her father. Will you do this without my telling you why I wish it?"

"Throth, I'm not a tiliscope, to be pryin' into the saycrets o' yer heart, Misthress Loyd. Shure, it's doin' anything fur ye I'd be. Be jabers, it's blind as a bat an' deaf as a post I am entirely. Lave me alone fur the goos-therumfoodle that will plaze ye moightily, Misthress Loyd, an' it's sly as a fox I'll be wid it all."

She pressed his hand warmly and hurried back to the house, confident that her plan was sure of success so far as Doyle was concerned.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

EXPLANATIONS FOR A PURPOSE.

WHEN Aziel entered the kitchen with a gleam of hope obscuring for the moment the habitual anxiety of her face, she found Volney sitting impatiently in his old place by the window. She had seen him thus many times before in his boyhood days. He was swaying himself to and fro in his chair with a restless motion. His

face alternately flashed and sneered with looks of anger and derision, while his pent-up feelings, finding no adequate expression in words, vented themselves in the violent drumming of his fingers upon the window-ledge.

"Here I am, you see, in my usual place of refuge," he exclaimed in a tone of suppressed feeling as he glanced up at her questioning face, over which a white rift of alarm was spreading. "You need not look so frightened. It's only the same old story; mother and I have been quarreling."

"Quarreling? No, not quarreling so soon after your return, I am sure," said Aziel in that soothing tone of other days he remembered so well. She threw aside her hood, came closer to him, and laying her hand gently upon his shoulder continued: "But try to calm yourself, Volney, and tell me what has happened. Let your old nurse help you to bear the trouble. It may become lighter if you share it with her."

"Azrael," he said with restrained energy, and with such a fierce gleam in his eyes that her face grew whiter, "do you remember how once, when I was a boy, you saw me rush wildly into the kitchen of our old house and seize a knife from your very hand? You asked me what I wanted to do with it, and I told you I was going to kill my father. He had wantonly struck me, and I sought to revenge myself upon him. Do you remember that morning? You caught me in your arms with a cry that still rings in my ears, and held me fast, kissing and caressing me. You talked so soothingly to me that I at last sobbed my anger away, and fell asleep in your lap from the sheer exhaustion of my passion."

"I remember," she gasped in a whisper, while a look of horror stole over her, and her hand, that rested on his shoulder, trembled violently. "But that was only a freak of boyish passion," she went on, trying to steady her voice. "You did not mean it."

"Yes, I did mean it," he rejoined, positively—"meant it just as much"—with a shudder in his lowered voice—"as I had a mind a few moments ago to strike my mother. Do not draw away from me so," noticing how she had slightly recoiled from him at these words. "Frenzied

with anger though I was, Heaven saved me from such a crime. I do not know how I controlled myself. It seemed to me that I could hear the spirit of my dead father whispering to me to strike her; and never in all my life—though many times, as you know, I have been terribly angry with her—was I so impelled to do her bodily harm. If it had been my father standing there, I know I could not have restrained myself. Oh how awful that a son, no matter for what reason, should have at times such murderous feelings—they deserve no better name—against his parents! I cannot, cannot understand it;” and his voice died away in a groan.

“What was it your mother said to you?” asked Aziel, forcing herself to speak calmly, though her voice was husky and tremulous.

She had now drawn more closely to him, her hand again laid caressingly upon his shoulder.

“She taunted me with my love for Emily—called her a beggar’s brat!” Volney replied, his tones again swelling with passion. “But this was not all, or I could have borne it better, hard though it was to hear the girl I so dearly loved scorned and defamed by my own mother. Yes, I could have borne that. When my mother took advantage of that innocent girl’s affection for me, and this very morning tried to get her to promise not to marry me on the plea that it would be for my happiness, oh, Aziel, can you wonder that I resented so angrily such a cruel, cruel act?”

“How do you know your mother did this?” the woman asked with a half-incredulous look. “She certainly had no opportunity to do so last night, and it was only a few moments before you came that I left Emily alone and your mother still asleep in her own room.”

“Emily told me the whole conversation with her own lips, the poor, innocent child! Mother found ample time, after you had left Emily, to creep into her room and try her wicked scheme on that trusting, loving creature.”

“Well,” said Aziel after a slight pause, during which her hand lightly stroked his head with a seemingly-unconscious motion, “I am sure she did not succeed. Certainly, Emily made her no such silly promise. I can see how

the dear girl loves you. Nothing but death can ever separate her from you. Ah! she knows, and I know, that you will always prove worthy of her."

"Dear, good Aziel!" he said with something of his old enthusiasm as he took her hand in his fervent grasp; "you always did know how to calm my passions and soothe every angry thought. Yes, it is as you say. Emily not only loves me, but she would marry me now, I believe, were I to ask her, despite mother's crafty counsels."

"Why should you not marry her whenever you choose?" replied Aziel with an encouraging smile. "I am sure you will soon be able to support her, and until then I can help you keep want at least from your cupboard. Besides, loving each other so dearly as you do, you will live happily, no matter how humble your home may be."

"Ah! those words are such as my mother should have spoken to me," he said, sadly, after many expressions of gratitude. "But it was always so. She was my mother only in name, while in you, dear Aziel, I have ever found the fond devotion a mother should have given me."

She was weeping softly, leaning over him with a yearning look of tenderness such as he remembered had so often lulled him to sleep and greeted the first wakening of his childhood slumbers. And while he was returning her gaze with a thankful, loving expression, she quickly put out her arms, threw them around his neck and burst into a flood of tears. But only for a moment. The next instant she had released him with a little hysterical laugh, and exclaimed, as she wiped away the tears from her happy face,

"I forgot, Volney, that you were a man. I thought, just for a second, you were my little boy again."

"If to be a little boy," he gayly rejoined, "is to retain your love, Aziel, consider me your little boy for life."

He arose and put his arms around her with a soft kiss such as he recollected she had often begged him to give her when he was a child and they had played alone in the orchard of the old farm-house.

"Now, my dear old nurse," affectionately patting her shoulder, "I must hurry away to the village in search of

information. If I should find any trace of the old man, I shall immediately take Emily with me and go in search of him. I hope we can leave this very night, for this house is no place for Emily, with mother here. No cote," his brows lowering a trifle, "that has a serpent in it is safe for a dove. Besides, old Gagger may return any hour, and I would sooner have Emily in the Old Boy's company than in his. But tell me before I go, Aziel, who you think this strange man is that Emily says has been visiting her father secretly of late, and was with him last night when he so mysteriously disappeared."

"What man?" asked Aziel with a look of feigned surprise. "Oh yes; now I remember," gazing steadily at the floor, as if she were trying to revive her recollection. "Emily did say something about a strange man that came to her father's house last night, but her description of him was so slight—for she never saw him but once, and then only with a mere glance—that I did not pay much attention to the matter. I have my suspicions, though, that this man may be her real father, with whom Grundle has been in some way in league to keep Emily hidden away in order that they two might possess themselves of her fortune. Perhaps the opportunity for which they have been so long waiting has now arrived, and they have gone away together to complete their scheme, of which this sudden desertion of Emily forms an important part. Such things have happened."

"The scoundrels!" muttered the young man. "I wish I could once lay my hands upon them! If they should only come within my grasp! No better pleasure would I covet than that of being even with them. Strange," he went on, slowly pacing the floor, "that Emily cannot remember how that stranger looked. What an innocent child she is! All faces must be alike to her. Ha, ha!" with a little laugh; "now, whom do you suppose she said this man resembled when I was trying to help her recall his features?"

"I am sure I cannot tell," answered his companion, turning slowly to the table and resuming her final preparations for breakfast.

"Why—would you believe it?—Emily said the strange man looked like *me*! Had it not been for the fear of

hurting her feelings, I should have laughed in her frank little face."

The loaf of bread which the woman was cutting fell from her grasp and rolled across the floor. The hand that held the knife let it drop upon the table with a convulsive motion. How loudly beat Aziel's betraying heart! How suddenly dizzy became her head!

It was merely for an instant she lost her self-possession. She sprang after the loaf with a little cry of seeming vexation, and hastened back to the table, her face, white with apprehension, turned away from him lest he should catch a glimpse of the terrible secret she felt was proclaiming itself in every feature.

"I am in such a hurry to get breakfast," she said, her back to him and forcing something of a laugh into her hollow voice, "that I am making more haste than speed. I never could cut a round loaf without letting it slip. Come! Everything is ready now. I will give you your breakfast first, so that you can hurry away to Grundle's cottage, and then to the village. You ought to lose no more valuable time in finding out all you can about last night's mystery."

"You are right," Volney answered, catching up his hat and turning toward the door. "I, of all others, should be foremost in these investigations. I will take my dear stepfather's horse and wagon, and drive fast enough and far enough to find out something before my return. Meanwhile, I leave Emily in your charge. See that mother has no private conversation with her. As to breakfast, I do not want any. I ate sufficient on the cars this morning. Give my share to Emily."

With a quick parting wave of his hand he darted out of the door and ran to the barn.

"Here, Pat!" he cried as that individual emerged from behind the pile of furniture, which he was critically examining with longing eyes; "don't waste any more of your time in valuing those traps. They are only fit for kindling-wood. Come, hurry! I want the horse and wagon in less time than you can say your prayers."

"Throth, Masther Volney, it's sayin' me prayers very fast I can be on a cowld night wid a warm bed forninst me.

So it's traps, is it, ye still be callin' this illigant furnichure? Well, well, well! If meself an' the colleen beyant at O'Hara's had the half o' thim, it's marryin' to-morrow we'd be, to be shure. Wirra, wirra!" he ejaculated, slowly withdrawing his gaze from the coveted objects; "it's losin' the bist half o' life I am waitin' for the loikes o' these things, bad 'cess to me poverty! Ah! 'tis the poverty that causes half the troubles of life."

"If Mr. Grundle does not come back to claim his property, you can have the whole of it," said Volney with an indifferent nod at the motley array.

"Oh, shure, it's jokin' wid me desires ye be, Masther Volney!" exclaimed the Irishman, quickly turning a comical doubting look upon him. "Throth, if I wor shure ye wor not humbuggin' me, it's callin' down on ye the blissin' o' Heaven I'd be doin' this very minit."

"Well, go on and call down the best blessing you can, for I was never more in earnest. I promise you that if Grundle does not come back to take possession of these things they shall become your property. Now, don't stop to thank me," as the Irishman began to give vent to loud exclamations of gratitude, "bnt just show your thankfulness by harnessing the horse as fast as you can."

"Blur an' agers!" cried Pat, rushing into the stall and bringing the animal out with a jerk that made him snort and rear; "it's hurryin' I'll be doin' faster nor a man wid two bumble-bees in his shoes. Oh, it's light me heart is now, wid that joyous promise ye made me. Throth, yer words raise the cockles o' me heart loike a moighty dhram o' the rale crathur.—Hould there, ye baste!" as the horse protested against this unusual haste by sundry snaps at Patrick's head as he was darting around and under him. "Where's the sinse o' ye takin' me head for a bundle o' hay? Troth, can't ye see the masther's in great haste? Here, ye omadhaun! git over there while I clap the wagon behind ye. Tare alive, ye are as stiff in the legs this mornin' as a miser's fist, so ye are, ye vagabone!—There, Masther Volney!" putting the reins in the young man's hand, while the perspiration streamed down his own excited face. "Wasn't it quick I wor doin' the job? Bedad, it's not faster I could work wor I goin' to dhrive to

me own weddin' this blissid day wid that comely lump o' a girl waitin' for me in the church beyant."

"Let us hope her wedding-day will soon come," said Volney, jumping into the wagon and seating himself, "and I am sure it will, if the possession of that heap of furniture can hasten it. Indeed, you can consider yourself the owner of those goods now. For—mark my word, Pat—the miser will never be seen again in these parts."

"May kind Heaven keep him miles out o' this!" ejaculated the Irishman with a momentary upward look of his serious face as the wagon slowly moved away. "It's not wishin' harrum to iny o' God's own crathurs I'd be doin', but, 'pon-me sowl, it's nivir havin' sore eyes I'd be, gazin' after owld Gruntle. It's not dead I'd be wantin' him, but long and hearty, shure, would I dhrink at his wake to-morry."

"Oh, here, Pat!" called Volney, halting as the vehicle reached the threshold of the wide door, and turning to the Irishman, who was standing with his gaze again riveted upon the furniture. "I forgot to ask you if you have seen anything of a strange man around here since I have been gone. The young lady—Emily—says there has been a mysterious man coming to her father's cottage of late, and that she is sure he was there last night. Have you heard of or seen any such person?"

"A strange man is it, do ye say?" his eyes growing unusually large and his mouth widely distended with well-assumed wonder. "Is it a leprechaun the colleen is talkin' about now? Whist!" suddenly dropping his voice, shaking his finger in token of silence, and drawing on tip-toe nearer his companion, "where wor it she saw him? Och, faix, if I could cum acress him, it's a big crockful of goold afore dusk I'd git from him, shure!"

"What's a leprechaun?" asked Volney, laughing, in spite of the man's serious face.

"Musha avic! Did ye niver hear o' the enchanted cobbler?" exclaimed Pat under his breath. "Troth, he's the fairy that would give ye piles o' goold fur a ransom if ye once lay yer tight grip on him. Sphake softly now. He may be forninst us hereabouts," glancing cautiously

around the barn. "Oh, bad 'cess to me luck! if I could only clap me two eyes on him now, wid his red coat, and breeches all covered wid goold lace, an' his little cocked hat! Whist! be aisy now! It's findin' him I may be this very minnit."

He began to steal softly around the barn-floor, his finger on his lips, peeping into the stalls and under boxes and barrels and the various farming-implements.

"Well, it's evident you can give me no information, so go on hunting your leprechaun. Maybe he will make you a prince of his realm before I return," said the young man, driving away and leaving the Irishman still busily engaged in his search.

When the vehicle had disappeared down the lane, Doyle, who had been watching it over his shoulder burst into a loud fit of laughter.

"Oh, Patrick, ye divil ye!" he exclaimed, seating himself on the chest and poking himself in the ribs as the tears streamed from his eyes. "Shure, it's desaivin' the father o' lies ye could be doin' this mornin'. Indade, it's the jewil o' a boy for thricks I am! Oh my! oh my! What a nate humbuggin' I gave Mashter Volney, shure, wid talkin' o' the leprechaun, whin divil a fairy at all, at all—God bliss thim!—have I seen in all my life! Och, wirrasthru!" suddenly checking his merriment and throwing up his hands in disgust; "where, faix, is the memory o' me? Shure, I forgot to till him to hurry off wid his colleen this very day! Oh, Patrick, ye are a born nat'ral to forgit the same, whin Misthress Loyd laid sich sthress on it. Troth, it's lost a foine breakfast ye have, whin ye till her what an omadhaun ye wor. And, be jabers, it's me ears that's achin' now fur the sound o' the atin'-bell! Well, well, well! Since me mimory—bad 'cess to it! has robbed me sthomaeh, it's feastin' me eyes in the mane time I'll be doin' on this foine furnichure. Ah, me colleen dhas!" he exclaimed, his gaze fastened on the pile with an anxious, greedy look; "pray wid all yer moight that owld Gruntle may niver lay his miserly eyes on these same agin. For wid these same illigant things, our weddin'-day's nigh at hand as winter itself. An' it's me own heart now that feels loike a lump o' shugar in me throat,

fur thinkin' o' that happy day Och hone! it's meltin' into wather me eyes are intirely!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

DEVELOPMENTS.

WHEN Volney reached Nicholas Grundle's hut, he found a large and excited crowd of villagers assembled. Men and boys, and here and there a female, all loudly talking, were roaming through the house, peeping into the windows, exploring the barn and searching with curious eyes every nook and corner of the garden, save that spot from which the grave kept them at a cautious distance. Volney alighted from the wagon and walked slowly up the path. The tumult of voices suddenly ceased, and all eyes were turned on him. Significant nods and suppressed exclamations, as the people gathered in groups, told him that his movements were now the sole object of their curiosity.

With a glance of recognition and a word of greeting to the friendly faces that peered at him from all sides, he entered the house. The first person that spoke to him was Rader Craft, who was standing just within the threshold, holding in his hand his note-book, in which, with a solemn face, he was slowly writing.

"Ah! good-morning, my young friend!" said the lawyer with a benevolent smile as he warmly shook Volney's hand. "You find me in the line of my professional duty, as usual. I am prosecuting investigations which will terminate, I am sanguine, in the successful unraveling of this mysterious concatenation."

"What conclusions have you thus far reached?" asked Volney in a low voice, beckoning Craft aside from the curious group that was already beginning to encircle them.

"Friends," exclaimed the lawyer, waving the people back with a benignant smile as he motioned Volney to the direction of the deserted wood-shed, "this case has

now assumed a legal aspect. You will oblige me and best subserve the interests of justice by allowing my client and myself an opportunity to converse and consult in private."

Then, turning to Volney when they were alone in the shed and he had closed the door upon the still prying eyes of the villagers, the lawyer asked,

"Do I understand that with remarkable foresight you have immediately retained my services in this important case?"

"Yes," was the ready answer; "and for whatever services you render me, or those even more directly interested than myself, I shall be glad to pay you to the full extent of my ability."

"Hem! It will require considerable monetary dispersion to prosecute the necessary inquiries in this case, omitting all mention of the legal acumen which must be aroused into ceaseless action and eternal vigilance if victory is to be the resultant. Suppose," continued Craft, smiling blandly and laying his hand with something of a fatherly motion upon Volney's shoulder, "you agree that my fee in this matter shall be in proportion to the property recovered? If under fifty thousand dollars, ten per cent. of the amount, after deducting all expenses from the principal; if over fifty thousand, say twenty per cent."

"I do not understand," said the young man with a puzzled face. "What property do you mean?"

"Is it possible that your intelligence has not better ramified the possibilities of this affair?" replied the lawyer with a touch of reproof in his kindly tones. "Then my revelations gathered this morning and confirmed by my previous suspicions, legally adjusted, will prove to you not only a surprise, but a harbinger of joy. Fortunes, when they come with love, are doubly blessed;" and his eyes glowed with a heavenly smile of approbation.

"Will you explain your meaning to me?" said Volney, somewhat impatiently. "Let us talk plainly. I have had more than enough of mystery already this morning."

"Why need I longer delay? Nor will I," said Craft half aloud to himself as he opened his note-book and

extended it, with the pencil, to his companion. "Here! glance your eye over this memorandum agreement, which I formulated in 'The Legal Refuge' in anticipation of this very conversation. If you affix your signature to this document, I will no longer hesitate to make you the recipient of the important revelations of which I am the sole possessor."

Volney read the agreement. It was as follows:

"I hereby agree that in case Rader Craft, Esq., attorney and counsellor-at-law, of Slowville, Wyoming County, State of Pennsylvania, who is employed by me for that express purpose, shall in any way, either directly or indirectly, succeed in recovering the fortune to which a young woman now resident in Slowville, and known under the name of Emily Grundle, is entitled, then the said Rader Craft shall receive as his compensation for his said services ten per cent. of the said recovered fortune if it be fifty thousand dollars or less, and twenty per cent. of said recovered fortune if it be more than fifty thousand dollars."

"What does this mean?" asked Volney after a pause, glancing from the book to his companion with an expression so dazed and confused that the lawyer added a trifle more of blandness to his reassuring smile.

"Explanations will be forthcoming after you have signed this paper," said Craft, extending his fountain-pen in answer to the still questioning face, and pointing with a little authoritative motion at the vacant space beneath the document where were the letters "L. S."

"But suppose the young lady has a fortune of which she is deprived for the present," said Volney, after he had read the agreement more slowly a second time; "what right have I, legally or otherwise, to promise you any portion of it for its recovery?"

"Explanations will be forthcoming after your signature is thereto affixed," was the reply, and the bland smile deepened with a suggestion of valuable information that was with difficulty suppressed.

"I still maintain the uselessness of my signature in this connection," slowly rejoined Volney; but as he saw how the lawyer's face gleamed with a hidden meaning he added, "However, as there seems to be no other way for me to gain the important information of which you are evidently possessed, I will sign my name. There it is!"

rapidly writing his signature and handing back the book. "Now oblige me by no further delay."

"One moment. We need a couple of witnesses to make this document a legal instrument," said the lawyer, stepping to the door and calling in two villagers, who, in response to his directions, wrote their names on the left of the young man's signature, while the lawyer's broad palm covered the agreement from their curious eyes.

"Now that the preliminaries are so admirably arranged," resumed Craft after the witnesses had reluctantly withdrawn, "we will proceed to the further elucidation of our arrangements. I shall not enter into detail nor burden your memory with minutiae," he continued, significantly tapping the open palm of his left hand with his right forefinger. "It is sufficient for our purpose that you should be put in possession of the main facts only of this exceedingly intricate case. Nor will it be of any advantage for you to know by what process of ratiocination, or how, aided by legal methods of observation, I have arrived at the particular conclusions which bear so weightily upon the successful issue of this affair. Let us plunge *in medias res*—into the midst of affairs. *Primo*—in the first place: Emily Grundle is an heiress; I am as confident of the truth of this affirmation as I am of the consciousness of my own identity. *Secundo*—in the second place: the singular life which has been imposed upon her by that old man who purported to be her father was only in strict accordance with the scheme to defraud her of her inheritance. *Tertio*—in the third place: the events of last night—namely, the disappearance of this old man in company with his mysterious companion—is the culmination of the aforesaid scheme. The time for possessing themselves of her fortune having arrived, these two mercenary despoilers of an orphaned maiden departed in the dead of night to complete the final act in this gigantic scheme of robbery."

The lawyer paused, looked inexpressibly solemn and blew a loud blast upon his handkerchief. He kept his eyes upon Volney's face for the space of a minute, and then asked in a low, grave voice,

"Do you apprehend, my young friend, the remarkable

concurrence of these various circumstances, pointing to but one legitimate inference—a defrauded heiress?”

“There is no doubt about her life being involved in some mystery,” replied the listener, his look of astonishment slowly giving way to a thoughtful expression. “I never could believe that Nicholas Grundle was her father. Your solution of the case is indeed a surprise to me. Yet it is not improbable, especially since you assert that what you have said are facts, and not inferences. Well, granting your view of the case to be the correct one, what is to be done? We certainly ought to act promptly.”

“A very correct as well as instantaneous apprehension of our duty!” exclaimed Craft, rubbing his hands gleefully, while his face rippled all over with approving smiles. “I was fearful you might hesitate in reference to my immediate action; but such not being the case, I shall now acquaint you with my plan of procedure, with no doubt as to its instant approval and your hearty co-operation.”

“Whatever duty falls to me in righting this wrong, you will find me quickly and willingly performing it,” said Volney, his countenance kindling with enthusiastic determination.

“Noble coadjutor of justice!” cried the lawyer, gazing at him with an admiring glance. “Your words ring in my ears like the bugle-blast of truth. Glorious! glorious! They presage victory, like the Spartan cry of old. Let us, then, delay not, but advance to the field of action. I have revealed to you three main facts; now I submit for your adoption three main duties arising from those aforesaid facts. *Primo*: you must take Emily Grundle away from Slowville this very night; *secundo*: you must marry her—a duty that will doubtless prove a pleasure; *tertio*: you must keep her in strict seclusion somewhere until we have discovered these villains and her appearance becomes necessary to convict them and regain her property. This, in brief, is your duty; the detective and legal portion of the case shall be mine. Now, do not object, for in no other way can our success be assured.”

Volney was already pacing the floor with a troubled face, slowly repeating to himself what the lawyer had

said. Strange it was, he thought, that this suggestion of marrying Emily so coincided with his own secret determination, which had been growing stronger as every moment of the morning had passed by. A new element had entered into the case, and it was this that disturbed him now. Emily, the lawyer had told him, was an heiress. If he should marry her in this clandestine way, would it not be said that, taking advantage of her ignorance of her true circumstances, he had made her his wife solely to possess himself of her money? His sensitive soul rebelled at this suggestion, and he uneasily walked about in silence.

"I see you hesitate about marrying the maiden for fear your motives might be misconstrued," said the lawyer, coming up to him. The young man nodded assent to his words; and laying his hand upon Volney's shoulder, Craft continued: "Why, when your happiness and hers is at stake, should you care what the world might say? Our best actions are many times misconstrued. The world's censure is as often misplaced as its praise. Come! let us discuss the plan more in detail, for its success depends chiefly upon your marriage with Emily. Unless you are her husband, you have no legal right to act for her. Simply as a friend you cannot protect her from the further machinations of these scoundrels, or successfully aid her in regaining her property when we have discovered it. One of these men is her lawful guardian, who may yet, failing in some way to gain possession of her fortune, return to claim his guardianship over her. As your wife she would be safe from their clutches, no matter what might be their evil designs. As her husband you would be her natural and lawful protector."

Thus the lawyer went on with his argument, so ingeniously piling up reason upon reason, and ever keeping in the foreground the imminent peril to which Emily, unmarried, was subjected, that his listener gradually yielded all objection to the plan, and at last consented to adopt it.

"Secrecy is an invaluable element toward our success. Do not tell even your mother of this conversation," said Craft as Volney made known to him his intention of going to Philadelphia with Emily. "It is best that you should

instantly return home and prepare for your departure this very night on the midnight train. You can find out nothing more at the village concerning these strange circumstances than I have already told you, except that the old man and his dog went eastward on a freight-train last night. Nothing has been seen of the stranger who was thought to be the miser's companion. Leave the finding of them both to me. I shall communicate progress to you. Let me see: what address did you say? Ah! I have it here," referring to his note-book. "'Care of William Marsh, Manayunk.' Well, good-bye, my son! God bless you! May the happiness of your married life be commensurate with your merits, and sweet as the lovely face of your adorable companion!"

They parted. Volney rode back home with a heart far lighter than he had borne when he came away. Yes, he would marry the girl, whatever the world might say. What other reason was there that he should not? Had not Aziel too suggested this very course to him? Ah! what else could he do to save Emily from cruelty and injustice, that without his protecting arm might yet doom her to a life of further misery. Poor, dear Emily! She had no one but himself to look to now for care and love and sympathy. But would she marry him so soon—to-morrow, perhaps? He drew a long sigh as he asked himself this question; then, after a moment's thought, a little smile of triumph lighted up his face. He had not the slightest doubt that she would marry him, no matter when or how or where he might wish her to.

Nor would the most skeptical in such affairs have had any doubt of the girl's reply had such a one this very night looked in upon these two, seated so closely together in the railroad-car that bore them toward the great city with a rush and whirl and grim rattle that never once disturbed the sweet rhythm of their loving thoughts. Oblivious of all surroundings, thinking only of each other, and conscious of no other presence save their own, they were talking in murmuring, happy tones. They were happiest of the happy—full of life and hope. Her head lay nestling on his shoulder and his arm was about her with a tender clasp, that now and then pressed her form more

closely as he joyfully thought how wholly dependent she was upon his protection and guidance.

The dim light of the overhanging lamp shone down in dull contrast upon their faces, so illumined with the transport of unrestrained love. She was indeed very happy, because her lover had promised again and again that she should see her father very soon. And until she should rejoin her parent, Volney besought her to love himself as dearly as she could, for her father would never again separate them. So loving him she was, not only dearly, but with every little fibre of her heart, that fluttered with unspeakable joy as she nestled still closer beneath his fondling caress. And he? Ah! he had never dreamed, even in love's most ecstatic visions, of such happiness as this. She was his—all his—now and for ever. Even when she should be his wife in name, as she was now in every thought and feeling, he was sure he could not love her more devoutly or become more enraptured by her presence. Then, with just the trifle of a sigh, he remembered that as yet he had not been able to muster the courage to tell her of his plan for their being married on the morrow. How should he tell her, and when could he best introduce the subject? Had he not already deferred this important question too long, and was it not growing the more formidable the longer he delayed it? With a dash of resolution he tried to speak. Somehow, his voice failed him. He felt the arm that encircled her suddenly trembling with a nervousness he could not control. He knew that an uneasy look of doubt and hesitation had already crept into his face.

Just then her hand stirred gently on his shoulder. Her eyes looked softly up at him with a glance full of tenderness and trust. Putting her little hand confidently in his own trembling palm, she asked in a murmur that thrilled him with its loving tones,

"Are you not very happy—so very, *very* happy—with me?"

"So happy that I cannot tell you of it all," he whispered in reply, stealing a soft kiss from her forehead in the flickering light. "Oh, if you were only my wife," he went on, as her eyes glistened with joy at his answer, "I should be the happiest man in all the world!"

"Cannot I be your wife whenever you want me to?" she asked with a look of wonder on her innocent, questioning face.

With a smile of mingled love and triumph for answer, he pressed her closer to him. His lips gently touched her cheek as he murmured,

"Dear, dear Emily! you are all mine now—all mine, my precious little wife!"

Onward whirled the train, with these two happy hearts neither knowing nor caring that the midnight hour had long since passed.

But there was one passenger among all the sleeping occupants of the car who had been an interested eye-witness of this love-making scene—a young man with a bird-cage at his side, who sat half a dozen seats in front of the lovers, on the other side of the aisle. He was apparently asleep. His slouched hat was drawn far over his face, while his head seemed buried in his arm, which was resting negligently on the back of his seat. Yet the eyes of this passenger, bright and peering as ever they were in broad daylight, had been fastened upon the lovers ever since they entered the car. His eyes had noted every movement of the young couple, and with wonderful intuition he interpreted their conduct aright; for now, as the lovers sank into slumber with a parting kiss, his watchful gaze was slowly withdrawn, his head turned away, and over his face there came an odd and cunning smile.

"The die is cast," he mentally ejaculated. "Scripturally speaking, these two shall be one flesh before to-morrow's sun hath reached its zenith, or William Dibbs is a better manipulator of the reviving fluid than he is a prognosticator of the immediate issue of such tender demonstrations. Well," he continued after a melancholy review of his unfortunate attachment for Azriel Loyd, "may Heaven speed them on their nuptial way, and may the bitter gall of regret never mingle with the sweet honey of their love! As for myself, when this wounded heart has sufficiently recovered from its present bereavement to relocate its affections, I shall try to apprehend a younger and more susceptible maiden than Azriel, who shall mean-

while remain the shrouded and sainted idol of my inmost soul."

With a brief glance of benediction at the sleeping lovers, Dibbs curled himself up in his seat and tried to sleep. But his own projects now began to dance about in his brain with anything but a composing motion, and he grew wider awake in his efforts to dismiss them.

"Avaunt, ye disturbers of rest!" he muttered, violently rubbing his head. "Knowest thou not that my cerebral activity must be preserved *in statu quo* for the morning? Cease, then, to absorb the nervous tissues of my brain any longer!"

With another effort at composure he glanced at Spike, already dozing on his perch, and closed his eyes. A moment later he was slowly counting, one by one, the customers as they filed in long array into his new saloon and each dropped a piece of money in the till; and thus he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XL.

NEW CHARACTERS, AND OLD ONES.

EVERYBODY in the neighborhood, from the decrepit old man down to the latest toddling child, knew Mrs. Sterrit. Why should they not all not only know her, but love her as they did, when, of all the people living in this locality, she alone had a cheering word and a kind smile for every one she met in her little rounds of marketing and visiting the poor? Yet every one, not excepting the blind man who so often ground his organ in front of her door, saw that her smile had a trace of sadness in it, like the shadowed lines in a brilliant picture. Her voice, too, was tinged with a trifle of melancholy even in its happiest tones, as if it were ever echoing some tender refrain of a sacred secret sorrow. Whatever was the hidden grief of "the dear little soul"—that was what everybody called her—she had never once alluded to it, even to those who had longest known her. Once, and only once, had her

next-door neighbor, when in an unusual state of sympathetic and curious excitation, sought to share some portion of this secret, which had for so many years been the chief subject of the neighborhood's speculation and gossip. In answer, Mrs. Sterrit quietly wiped away the little gush of tears which the question had evoked, and said, as she gratefully pressed the woman's hand,

"It is better that I should not tell. God's ways are not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts. If some day He shall reveal it, as I am sure He will," with an upward glance of fervent faith that made her features glow with an angelic trust, "then you shall know the heavy load of sorrow I have carried here these many years," laying her hand upon her heart, "yet carrying it always, I hope, with my faith growing stronger every day that He does indeed do all things well. Ah! we poor simple creatures find it very hard at times to submit to His will, and to kiss the hand that chastens us; yet this is life's best and dearest lesson, hard though it be."

This afternoon the early twilight of the autumnal day was settling down upon the city. Mrs. Sterrit was seated beside the window in her little quaint rocker, with the Venetian blinds turned aslant, throwing the fast-departing rays of light upon the open book that lay in her lap. She had always sat here at this hour these many years, reading this book. She would often stop in its perusal, and closing her eyes meditate a while, her folded hands resting upon the printed page as if clasped in prayer.

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.'"

These words now trembled upon her lips. Something in this divine message seemed to suddenly awaken the strongest emotions of her soul, for the response that came to her voiceless lips was a long, weary sigh that, welling up from her heart's depths of sadness, at last filled her eyes with blinding tears. Fainter and fainter grew the lines of the sacred book. Yet softly she again breathed out the divine exhortation as she drew the vol-

ume closer with a caressing motion and leaned over the precious page.

"Blessed words!" she murmured, the tears falling upon them with a baptism of gratitude. "Ah! they never fail to comfort me, though they will bring to my mind so strongly the long, long years I have been waiting, waiting, waiting!"

Kissing the lines she had read, she closed the book tenderly. Her clasped hands rested softly upon the volume. Her drooping head gradually fell upon her bosom. On her silver locks a parting ray of sunlight rested like a tender touch of Heaven's own invisible hand.

Far away, back through the years that had passed so slowly, her thoughts went with the speed of love's unerring memory. Now was vivid as the awful day it happened the one great sorrow of her soul with which Heaven had then beclouded her happy life. In one brief moment had been taken from her all that her heart held sacred. Without a word of warning the dearest and most blessed ties of her existence had been severed. Yet improbable as it seemed because of the lapse of years that these treasures would ever be hers again, or that those ties would be reunited in this world, she had never once lost faith in such a belief. Like a vestal lamp this hope had burned with a bright unceasing flame in her darkened heart. Never brighter were its beams than now, as she turned from the terrible scene which memory had pictured with such pitiless completeness, and breathed again her ever-present prayer of faith and hope.

"Gig, Gog, Gagger!" exclaimed a young female voice, bursting in upon the solemnity of this scene. "I never seed such a crabbed man! I wish I had a-died afore he came to this house. But I'll spill him on the floor yet, the old vinegar-cruet!"

The speaker was a girl—or more nearly a woman—of robust and good-proportioned figure, that looked well despite her plain and slovenly attire. Her red hair hung down behind her in two long braids, while a row of dirty curl-papers decorated her well-shaped forehead. Her short dress, with here and there a rent, disclosed a pair of untied shoes down at the heels. Her arms, bare to the

elbows, were violently gesticulating. Her large eyes were glaring with vindictiveness, while her unusually white teeth gleamed through her angrily-parted lips.

"Charity, my child," said Mrs. Sterrit, quietly turning to the girl and putting out her hand with a little reproving gesture, "why do you allow your passion to get the better of you? Don't you know that we submit ourselves to one of our worst enemies when we give way to our anger?"

"No, I don't," stoutly rejoined the girl, her shaking head keeping time with her wrathful arms. "I believe in getting mad, I do. Who's to take your part, if you don't take it yourself? Oh yes; I know all you're going to say—about my being a woman, and all that. But what's 'being a woman' got to do against my standing up for my rights, I should like to know? I wish I were a man; I would punch him in the eye, so I would. And I've a good mind to, anyhow, the old heathen!" shaking her fist in the direction of the room above.

While Charity had been speaking, Mrs. Sterrit had risen from her chair and gently approached her. She laid her hand soothingly upon the girl's shoulder, and said, with a little mournful shake of her head,

"Charity, my dear child, it grieves me very much to hear you talk in this way."

"Does it, though?" cried Charity, wrenching herself away. "Well, it does me good, so it does. What's a person's tongue worth if you can't blab out what you mean, once in a while? Gingo Cæsar! I never was madder!" she continued, clenching her fists and gritting her teeth. "Oh, if I only had hold of him now, I would make his bones crack, or I'm no orphan!"

"Charity, Charity!" was the mild exclamation of the little woman as she looked beseechingly at her. "Don't use such dreadful language. Won't you be quiet? Please do! Tell me now what has made you so angry. You know I would not willingly let anybody impose on you. You are all I have to love in this world, Charity, my dear!" putting her hand with an affectionate gesture upon the other's arm.

"Now, don't talk and look that way, Mrs. Sterrit," said

Charity, somewhat mollified as the old lady continued her demonstrations of affection. "If you do, you'll drive all the mad out of me. And I want to keep it, I do. It kind of makes me feel good, so it does. You never knowed, I guess, what a real comfort it is to get your Dutch up when people is imposing on you. Dear me! I wouldn't have your soft heart if you could give it to me this minute. It would just make me miserable, so it would. Getting mad is the only luxury I have. Indeed, I'd sooner die than not be able to get mad with those that abuses me. I wish I was dead now, so I do. Who cares for me? I'm nothing but an orphan, anyhow. Orphans gets no show in this world. I hopes they'll get some one to use them right in the next world. Oh dear! oh dear! I wish I was riding in a hearse, I do. It's the only chance I'll get to ride in a carriage, unless I marries a rich man. But there's no show for me to get married. No fellow wants to marry an orphan that's got no money!"

Here she began to cry as passionately as she had before been giving way to her anger. Mrs. Sterrit put her arm around the girl's neck and drew her unresisting head down upon her shoulder. Caressingly patting the tear-streaming cheek, she said,

"Charity, my dear, do you remember the day I first brought you here? It will be just twelve years ago next Saturday since I led you in yonder door, a dear, sweet child. I can see you now," her tremulous voice somewhat recovering itself, "staring around the room with your little look of wonder and pleasure as you asked me whether I was going to be your mother and make this your home. Did I not fold you in my arms and kiss you, Charity, and say then, as I do now, that this was not only to be your home, but that I would try to love and care for you as your own dear dead parents would have done? Oh, Charity, I have loved you far, far more than you can ever know. Yes, I have tried to keep my promise; I have done my duty by you as God has given me the ability. I did not think I should ever live to hear you say that I do not love and care for you!"

"Oh, please don't cry! I didn't mean that!" quickly replied Charity in a tone as sympathetic as that of her

mistress, throwing her arms around Mrs. Sterrit and wiping the tears away from the old lady's eyes with the cleanest corner of her own soiled apron. "You have been the dearest mother to me, so you have. I don't deserve it, neither, I don't. Oh dear! oh dear! I was trying to be so good before that old curmudgeon came here. Why, I hadn't said one of those bad words, as you call them, for three whole days, and I wasn't mad for a week. But ever since he has been in the house he's riled me up so that I've been dancing around all day like a drop of water in a red-hot skillet."

"True—too true. Mr. Gagger's disposition is a very excitable one," said Mrs. Sterrit as the girl stood silent and evidently tried to control the feelings which these last words had aroused. "But, Charity dear, you will be better able to bear with him if you will only remember that he is an old man. Besides, he is afflicted just now with the gout—a very painful and irritating disease. And I judge, from what his nephew Silas says, he is worried, too, by some recent domestic trouble. Ah, Charity! we would all make greater allowances for people's shortcomings could we know their secret sorrows and trouble."

"I wish he had paralytics instead of gout," rejoined Charity with a malicious gleam in her eyes. "Then I wouldn't get half so mad at him. He couldn't throw his cane at me then, as he did just now. But I was too quick for him. I dodged the cane; indeed did I! It flew against the looking-glass and smashed it all to pieces. Then it bounded back like a base-ball, and struck him on his gouty foot. Oh, you ought to have heard him roar and cuss! It was better than a menagerie, so it was."

The girl, despite the old lady's mild remonstrance, gave a rapid and gleeful representation of the scene, imitating the voice and manner of Silas Gagger to such perfection that her companion could not repress a smile, for which her heart chidingly reproached her, for all the tenderness of a true woman was in her heart.

"Poor old soul!" resumed Mrs. Sterrit with a look of deepest sympathy. "How I pity him, being forced to make his home with strangers! Ah! an old man all alone in the world has indeed a miserable lot. An old

woman always finds a home or friends somewhere, but who cares for an old man?"

"I never saw such a woman for loving old men as you are," said Charity, half soliloquizing. "It's very strange, so it is. I believe you would sooner see an old man go by this house than a procession of real kings a mile long. Oh," excitedly throwing up her hands, "I must not forget to tell you. There was the funniest-looking old man went by our alley-gate just afore I came in. It was while you was reading your Bible."

"How did he look? How old was he?" suddenly asked Mrs. Sterrit, a tremor in her voice and a startled look, half questioning, half hopeful, in her eyes, though she strove to conceal her agitation.

Strange that this excitement always came upon her when she saw an old man in the streets or heard that one had passed near the house unobserved by her.

"Well," continued Charity with a long breath as she smoothed her apron and tried to look as important as the relation she was about to make, "he was the queerest old man I ever seen. I'll tell you just how I saw him. I was down at our back gate talking with Lanty Joy. Lanty, you know, is the boy that tends bar over at the Golden Bowl. He was going home to his supper. 'What's the news, Lanty?' says I; and says he, 'Lots! I'm going to have a new boss to-morrow. The cops are layin' for Billy the Cleaver, and he's got to light out or he'll be jugged.' 'Who's the new boss?' said I. 'A feller from the country,' says he. 'I seen a telagrip from him to my old boss to-day.' 'What was in the telagrip?' says I. 'Hold Golden Bowl for me. Will buy. Start to-night. William Dibbs,' says he—"

"But the old man, Charity dear? Please do not be so long, but tell me about him," interrupted Mrs. Sterrit, putting out her hands with just the trifle of an impatient gesture.

"Well," another long breath and a loud smack of the lips, "I'm coming to him now. Lanty soon ran off home, and was turning the corner when I looked down the alley and saw an old man and a savage-looking dog sneaking up this way. So I just closed the gate and put my eye to

a knothole in the fence and watched them. Would you believe it? By and by the old man and his dog came along and sat right down on the sidewalk, almost under my very nose. There was only the fence between us, so I could hear every word he said. It was an awful queer lot of gab. He was whispering and talking low, kind of simple-like, to the dog."

"Poor soul! His mind is probably weak with age and suffering. What did he say?" The old lady's voice was very husky and there were tears in her eyes.

"Why, it was the queerest talk I ever heard. The dog, though, acted as if he understood every bit of it, which was more than I did. I can't remember it all, the old man whispered so, and his voice was so shrill and cracked like. It was something like this he said: 'Yes, yes, Cæsar! we are on their track. Ah! they won't get away from us, will they? You must watch every face, Cæsar; you must smell everybody. Your poor old master is now blind, you know. Ha, ha! Blind! blind! Here, Cæsar, do you remember this? Ah! I know you will look sharp for Emily.' Then he took a girl's shoe from his pocket and rubbed it over the dog's nose, and the dog licked the shoe and whined just as if he was crying."

"Emily!" sighed the listener, whose attitude had been one of intensest interest, holding on to the girl's arm with a trembling grasp, her white face rapt in an eagerness of expectation. "Poor old soul, he has lost his child! May God in His mercy soon bring her back to him!"

"Another awful funny thing he did," resumed Charity. "He kind of fondled the shoe for a while, and cried over it just like a baby. Then he put it back in his pocket and took out a piece of white rag. This he rubbed on the dog's nose, saying something like this: 'You remember him, Cæsar? Yes, you never did like him. So you will find him sooner for that. You know, Cæsar—a tall man with a black beard on his lips and chin.' I never saw the beat of that dog! He just jumped right up like he'd been shot. He grabbed that piece of cloth in his mouth, and shook it and growled as if he was mad; and

the old man laughed and patted him on the head, and hugged him and hugged him. It was as much as he could do to get the cloth away from the dog. At last he did, and hid it in his pocket. Then he got up and hobbled away, with the dog in front of him, hitched to a chain, and he holding on to it. He looked just like an old blind man I once read of being led around by a dog."

"Was he a small man? Had he a stoop in his shoulders? Did you see his face? Was it a small, thin face? Were his eyes black? Did he put his hands up to his temples this way, as if they were aching him?"

These questions the old lady asked in such an excited, half-frantic manner that the girl's own face took on a look of amazement.

"Why, Mrs. Sterrit, what makes you look so white?" exclaimed Charity. "The man can't be any relation of yours, can he? I wish now I'd opened the gate and looked after him, so I could tell you more about him, but I was so awful afraid of that dog. I believe if he'd known that I was listening to his master he would have jumped clean over the fence and torn me into inch bits; indeed he would!"

Mrs. Sterrit had hurriedly taken her bonnet and shawl from the little closet while the girl had been speaking. Putting them on with nervous, rapid motions, she hastened toward the door, saying to the girl in a voice agitated beyond concealment,

"Charity, my dear, I must see this old man if I can. Something tells me I must see him."

When the old lady had gone, and Charity saw her form flit by the window in the direction the aged stranger had taken, she sat down in a chair, and folding her hands thus soliloquized:

"I wonder if she will ever get through hankering after old men? This makes about the forty-'leventh thousand she's run after, to my own knowledge. What in the world does she want of these old men, I should like to know? I wonder if she wants to get married, and is trying to take her pick of the lot? Oh dear! I wish I was married, I do. I wonder what kind of a fellow William Dibbs is, that Lanty says is going to buy out the Golden

Bowl? Maybe he's a good chance for me. I'll lay for him to-morrow; indeed will I! Perhaps Mr. Dibbs might take a shine to me. I know of worse-looking girls than I am," tossing her head with a saucy air, "that have snapped up a fellow at first sight. Hello! There's old curnudgeon pounding on the floor with his cane. Wants his toast and tea. Good-bye, sweet William! I'm going for you to-morrow."

With a ringing laugh and a hop, skip and jump she disappeared into the kitchen, and catching up a slice of bread prepared to toast it, running the fork into it with the muttered exclamation, "I wish you was old Gagger's sore foot; indeed do I!"

CHAPTER XLI.

WILLIAM DIBBS FINDS A CLEW.

"**T**HOUGH haste doth not become a gentleman, let me not linger longer amid the initiatory scenes of my triumph!" exclaimed Dibbs under his breath as he leaped from the car with his bird-cage and valise. His quick eyes caught sight of the rear entrance to the dépôt. He cast a parting look at Volney and Emily, who were walking slowly arm in arm toward the main door. Then he darted away with an approving smile, and was soon hurrying along the back streets, now and then glancing over his shoulders as if he were expecting to be followed. He did not slacken his rapid pace for some time. Although his main direction was the same, he turned here and there, now to the right and now to the left, threading his way wherever an alley or arched passage or unfrequented street met his view. All the while there was a gleam of mischief in his eyes and a smothered smile upon his face. At last, after an hour of this hasty zig-zag walking, which seemed to partake wholly of the nature of a flight, he came to one of the open squares of the city. Here he sought out an obscure seat, and placing his valise and cage beside him thus de-

livered himself, with many a laugh and gleeful rubbing of his hands :

“ William my boy, you have surpassed yourself ! Your native talent has this morning shone resplendent as yon gorgeous luminary of the heavens. Your skillful manipulation of dubious currency was a stroke of financial genius that, unrestrained, would extinguish even the national debt. I wonder what impressions of your rural innocence prevail at present in the raging bosom of your turkey-friend ? Wanted to liquidate a little bill of sixty dollars with my temporary assistance, did he ? Well, did I not aid him with that quick response to humanity’s urgent call which ever thrills my noble heart ? Did I not generously tender him the loan of that one-hundred-dollar bill which I informed him with a husky voice—a very husky voice—my mother had bestowed upon me, with her parting prayer for my success, when I had bid adieu to the old homestead the night previous ? How profuse his expressions of gratitude ! How eagerly his hand clutched that sacred parental gift ! How cheerfully his urgent creditor, with a compliment upon my mother’s thoughtful generosity, returned me the forty dollars of good money in change !

“ Oh, Gunbridge & Co. ! ” he continued, the tears of laughter running down his face ; “ had you witnessed this transaction, you would have been amply repaid, I hope, for your confidence in me—a confidence, gentlemen, which will never be confirmed by any pecuniary remittance on the part of yours truly. No, gentlemen ; through my beneficent instrumentality, the ends of justice, impartial and exacting, have been satisfied. You thought to swindle me, but you yourselves have been victimized, and my turkey-friend, who believed he was about to pluck a barnyard-fowl, as he did Volney Slade the other day, was himself surreptitiously relieved of forty genuine dollars. Doubtless ere this our turkey-friend is examining that parental gift, so redolent of new-mown hay, with the philosophical reflection that ‘ the way of the transgressor is hard. ’—Ha, ha, Spike ! ” addressing the bird, who was knowingly blinking up at him ; “ I see by your complimentary wink that you comprehend the situation. Yes, Spike, we have already shown our ability to cope successfully with the com-

mercial irregularities of the metropolis. But these forty dollars thus deviously obtained, though in the cause of retributive justice, I shall bestow upon the first poor woman I meet, and thus, Spike, shall I make defeated villainy serve a noble purpose—namely, the relief of wretched poverty's oft-despised call.

"But now to more important business," suddenly growing serious and taking from his pocket-book a little slip of printed paper. "There is much to be accomplished to-day. Large demands will be made on my cerebral activity. Well, let that transaction which is most important lead the van of mine endeavor. First allow me to observe that no proverb has been more successfully proved by mankind than that one feathered songster, secure in a person's five digits, is better than two such inhabitants of the air hopping on a diminutive tree. Guided by this proverbial truth, I shall first secure possession of this desirable saloon. This having been effected, I shall immediately commence a series of investigations which will undoubtedly reveal the whereabouts of the miser as well as the hiding-place of that midnight marauder, Seth Slade."

Settling his roving, watchful eyes for a moment upon the slip he held in his hand, he read it half aloud, commenting as he went along:

"'For sale. The best drinking-corner in the city.' A corner is a most desirable location for an imbibing establishment. A corner is conspicuous, accessible and inviting. Even an individual already saturated with the elevating fluid finds it extremely difficult to successfully resist the fascinating beckonings of a corner. Swinging irresolutely on the irregular periphery of his intoxicated locomotion, he comes to a sudden standstill on a corner. Then, with a firmer tread, he pushes through the hospitable door in search of his final potation. Yes, a corner appeals strongly to my comprehensive judgment. For without a proper location one's business cannot expand to its most desirable dimensions. 'A large and paying custom.' 'Large!' That is susceptible of various interpretations, truthful and otherwise. 'Paying!' That is a good word of most excellent meaning. It has the ring of true financial success. Of

what avail is even a large custom in the accumulation of wealth, unless it be a paying one? No, William my boy, a man of large credits has small hopes, and smaller prospects. 'Will be sold cheap to a quick and cash buyer.' A bargain of two terms, the latter of which I can readily fulfill, but of the first I reserve to myself the sole judgment. Cheapness is a relative term, based solely upon personal considerations. 'Immediate possession. Apply at Golden Bowl, — street, Philadelphia.'

"I shall instantly change that decidedly plebeian name," said Dibbs, preparing to leave the Square. "It savors not of a prudent respectability. It is too suggestive of inordinate imbibitions. Customers do not want reminders of their little irregularities flaunted continually before their vision. Moreover, outward concealment of the true character of men's haunts is most desirable for matrimonial happiness. No! The exterior of William Dibbs' establishment shall be so devoid of all suspicion of revelry that no Argus-eyed wife can penetrate its mysteries or proclaim with clarion voice the methods of its business."

Thus revolving the subject in his mind, and deciding on several details which he would adopt in the management of his projected undertaking, he hastened on his way. Avoiding, as before, every main thoroughfare, and occasionally casting a cautious glance behind him, he came at last in sight of the Golden Bowl.

As the advertisement had stated, this establishment stood on a corner. It was a one-story brick structure, the corner cut off by the generous entrance of swinging double doors. There were no windows at the side, but in front was a large bulk-window, its wood-work painted brilliantly in red. In the centre of this window was the figure of a huge golden bowl, the steam from whose hidden decoction was issuing in a dense cloud, that rose above it in a perpendicular line to the height of several feet. On the apex of this cloud two Cupids were sportively reaching after a concave line of golden letters above them that spelled "The Golden Bowl." The remaining surface of the window was filled with various glaringly-illuminated cards, setting forth both the variety and desirability of the beverages and viands to be found in the inner precincts.

With the prudence that was a natural reflex of his business sagacity, Dibbs entered a neighboring grocery bearing a dull look upon his face. He inquired of a stalwart, healthy and exceedingly vivacious female who stood behind the counter whether she could tell him why the Golden Bowl was for sale.

"Of course I can; and I ain't afraid to, neither," responded the woman with energy, shaking her fist in the direction of the saloon with an exultant motion. "The perlice is after that place red hot. Billy the Cleaver, as he calls himself, has got to leave these parts right away, or be jugged. That's what's the matter. I'm mighty glad he's 'got to the end of his rope, though. Such goings-on as there's been in that saloon lately is enough to ruin 'this neighborhood. Men has been drugged and robbed, and there's a fight going on 'most every night, and the poor mill-hands is drinking up every cent of their savings. Young man," leaning on the counter and looking at Dibbs with a face as solemn as her voice, "rum is an awful cuss. It's the cause of most of the trouble people has in this world—"

"Madam," interrupted Dibbs with a respectful inclination of his head, while his face was illumined with a bland, sympathetic smile, "theory and fact respond alike to the truth of your eloquent sentiments. The continued and inordinate gratification of any appetite invariably degrades our moral nature, exhausts our physical vigor, and eventually inevitably submerges our domestic joys in a cataclysm of irretrievable destruction. It is impossible to reconcile health, prosperity and happiness with intemperance. Here, most comprehensive female, allow me to thank you for your valuable information as well as for your moral reflections."

With a profound bow at the staring and wondering face of the woman he hastily withdrew. Before she caught sight of him again, although she had leaped the counter and run to the door, he had disappeared within the Golden Bowl. Here, setting his valise and cage upon the sanded floor, he walked with a slouching motion up to the bar, behind which were two persons, a man and a boy. The boy's face was fresh, keen and active. With the agility of one

of his age, he was cleaning glasses, polishing decanters and bottles, and deftly arranging them upon the shelves behind him. His eyes were all the while scanning the new-comer, who by this time had ordered a lemonade and was silently and with a knowing look sucking the same through a straw.

The man was short, thickset and muscular. His round, brutal head with cropped hair stood up defiantly upon square, massive shoulders. His strong neck was bare, his collarless shirt displaying every portion of its sinewy surface. His rolled-up sleeves revealed arms that were swelled and knotted with excessively-developed muscles, while his broad chest gave evidence of vigorous vital powers. Fixing his small vicious, bloodshot eyes on his silent customer, whom he detected taking roving glances around the room over his glass of lemonade, he asked, in a menacing voice,

"What's your business here, any how? You didn't come in just to get a lemonade. Now, mind," bringing his fist down on the bar with a blow that made Dibbs' empty glass dance, "if you're playin' the detective on me, you'll go out of that door with the biggest mansard roof on your head you ever had!"

"A superstructure of that character would not be desirable for my anatomical perfection," replied Dibbs with a quiet smile as he laid a ten-cent note down on the counter in payment for the beverage. "The object of my appearance can soon be made apparent. Have I the honor, as well as the pleasure, of addressing the proprietor of this establishment, familiarly known in this locality as Billy the Cleaver?"

"That's me," was the bold reply as the man squared himself. "What do you want?"

"Simply to investigate the surroundings with a view to purchase—"

"He's the man that sent the telegraph," interrupted the boy, whispering in the man's ear.

"Correct, my comprehensive lad," resumed Dibbs with a complimentary nod to the youth; then, addressing the man: "I am Mr. William Dibbs, the author of the telegraphic communication you received yesterday."

"Eh? Well, I'm glad to see you, Mr. Dibbs!" exclaimed the Cleaver with a conciliatory laugh, reaching over the bar and catching Dibbs' hand in a grip that made him wince with pain. "That's a bunch of fives that never yet went back on a gentleman. So you've come to buy me out, have you? All right! If you're in dead earnest, it's a business we can soon settle," coming from behind the bar. "Look around for yourself, and make me an offer. If it comes near my figure, the ranche is yours."

"Not much stock on hand," commented Dibbs, coming down to simple phraseology and taking on an air of business as he went behind the bar and more closely surveyed the shelves. "Good many empty bottles. Make a fine show, though. Demijohns not very full," touching with his foot several of these articles stowed under the counter. "What have you got in the cellar?"

"A keg of ale and a barrel of whiskey," replied the man, slyly winking at the boy. "No use of carrying a big stock."

"Both full?" asked Dibbs, his back turned, and apparently engaged in examining the large mirror that hung behind the bar; yet by the aid of this glass his eyes were all the while covertly fixed on the man and the boy.

"Yes; they haven't been touched yet," answered the Cleaver with a threatening look at the boy.

"Yes, they're full," quickly spoke up the lad.

"Pretty good looking-glass—a wide mark for a beer-mug," said Dibbs, coming again in front of the bar.

He slowly made a circuit of the room, glancing at the pictures on the walls and counting the tables and chairs ranged on both sides, which, with several spittoons, completed the furnishing of the apartment.

"Ah! what's this?" opening a door in the rear, which disclosed a small room partitioned off from the main saloon.

"That's for gentlemen customers, where they can have a quiet little game and a social glass. We've lots of them sly customers.—Eh, Lanty?" said the Cleaver, scowling at the lad.

"Yes; lots of 'em," instantly echoed the youth.

"Well, I guess I've looked around enough," drawled

Dibbs, leisurely seating himself on one of the tables and turning upon the man a very indifferent face. "Suppose we come down to dots and talk business. I've got to give the refusal of several other places in less than an hour. I don't think," he went on, reflectively watching his slowly-swinging legs, "that I like the situation of any of them much better than that of this place, but their stocks are a great deal larger and they are for sale very cheap, which is a good thing for my small amount of cash. What's the rent of this place?" addressing the man, who was already eyeing him with a disappointed expression.

"Only thirty dollars a month."

"Whew! A big rent for these hard times. Landlord must be a shark. Why, I just saw a saloon a little larger than this which rented for twenty-five dollars."

"Must have been a mighty mean neighborhood, then," rejoined the Cleaver with a trifle of surliness.

"Perhaps so," responded Dibbs with a conciliatory nod. "How long a time before your lease runs out?"

"Two years."

"Can you sub-let?"

"Yes. Here's the lease; read it yourself."

Dibbs carefully read the paper, and handed it back with the comment,

"I see no security is required."

"No; the landlord is a square man."

"Humph!" laughed Dibbs. "At thirty dollars a month he ought to be able to square the circle. Well, what's your price for good-will, fixtures, stock and the unexpired term of the lease? Now, name the very lowest sum you'll take, for," drawing out his watch and looking anxiously at it, "I haven't a minute to spare in beating you down a dollar."

"Well, seeing I want to sell right away and you don't seem to be loaded with greenbacks, give me five hundred dollars in cash, and the place is yours," replied his companion after a hesitating pause, during which he seemed to be reluctantly throwing off quite a sum from the original price he intended to ask.

Dibbs threw up his hands and suddenly lost his balance

when this sum was named. He came near falling upon the floor, but by an extraordinary effort regained his equilibrium.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, his eyes starting with astonishment. "You didn't hit me in the face, did you? Take me for a noodle, but you can knock me clean over with a feather now! Five hundred dollars! Why, my dear friend, you do not know me. I have not been the president of a trust company or the cashier of a bank."

"How much cash have you got, anyhow?" impatiently asked the man, beginning to watch the window nervously in response to a secret signal from the boy.

"Only one hundred and fifty dollars, and that takes my last red," replied Dibbs, dejectedly shaking his head, while his keen eyes were watching the man and the boy and the two figures on the opposite side of the street with hidden glances.

"Well, luck's running against me now. So spill out your cash: the place is yours. There's the lease!" tossing him the paper.

The man had been hurriedly putting on his coat and otherwise preparing himself for the street while speaking, not omitting to place a revolver in his hip-pocket with a menacing look toward the opposite sidewalk, where two men stood watching the saloon.

Dibbs, equally as active, in the mean time procured pen and ink from Lanty. He rapidly wrote a transfer of the lease on the back of the document, and slowly turning to the man, who was all impatience, said,

"My friend, your sign-manual appended to this instrument will be necessary to consummate our business transaction."

"Here! give me your money," said the other fiercely as he rapidly scrawled something like a name on the paper and shook his hand in Dibbs' face. "You're the slowest go I ever saw."

"I declare!" drawled Dibbs as he slowly emptied each pocket on the bar and began counting the little pile of rolled and twisted bills; "I haven't got as much as I thought. Take me for a noodle, I've been robbed! A stranger, and they took me in! I say, friend," address-

ing the man, who was already seizing the money, "you couldn't take an even hundred for the place, could you?"

For answer, Billy the Cleaver snatched the money that lay upon the counter with an oath, and running swiftly to the rear of the saloon as quickly disappeared through the back window.

"What's the matter with him?" asked Dibbs of the boy. "Has he got the hydrophobia?"

"See those fellows over on the other side of the street?" whispered Lanty, slyly winking toward the front window, from which the two men on the opposite sidewalk were plainly visible. "Well, I know the cut of their jibs. They are detectives. They are laying for Billy. Got a warrant for him, I'll bet, and were afraid to serve it. But the Cleaver has given them the slip, dead sure, this time. Oh, but he is a skipper when he knows the cops want him!"

"By 'cops' do I rightly apprehend that you mean the properly-instituted officers of the law, commonly known as policemen?" asked Dibbs, who was already gazing around with a look of proprietorship, his hands in his pockets and a cunning smile on his face as his fingers caressed two small rolls of bills which had not been produced for Billy the Cleaver.

"Whist!" softly whispered Lanty. "I believe they are going to try it on now," as the two men slowly separated, one crossing the street and the other going toward the rear of the saloon. "And they have got their hands on their shooting-irons, too."

"Silence, youth! Let me receive the myrmidons of the law," exclaimed Dibbs with a lofty flourish of his hand as he strode toward the door, and opening it wide admitted the astonished officer with a profound bow.

"Cast thine astounded eyes in whatever direction thou wilt," said Dibbs as the man stood still, regarding him with a dazed look, "they shall not rest upon the desired individual of thy search. Nor can thy comrade, who enters yon rear window, aid thee in thy fruitless mission."

"Who are you?" at length asked the officer, his eyes roaming quickly around the place, and then resting with

a puzzled expression upon Dibbs, whose face was singularly peaceful and his arms folded gently upon his breast.

"Officers, gentlemen, fellow-citizens," said Dibbs with an expansive gesture as the other officer, as nonplussed as his comrade, came forward and joined them, "my noble surname is Dibbs; my Christian cognomen, William. I have the honor to be the proprietor of this establishment, which I hope you have entered thus unceremoniously with full legal authority so to do. Otherwise I shall consider it my duty, as a staunch upholder of the legal rights of society, to proceed against you for trespass, and to seek such other remedy as a wise and beneficent law may afford me."

"Where's Billy the Cleaver?" demanded one of the officers, his hand laid nervously upon the hilt of his revolver, which projected from his pocket. "He was here a few moments ago. We saw him through this very window."

"Far be it from me to deny your assertion or to endeavor to persuade you to forego the evidences of your own senses; but that you saw William the Separator a few moments ago in this particular locality is no reason that he still remains hereabouts. Action, my dear sir, is the law of life, and exercise is necessary to health. William may be taking his constitutional at this present time. That you may be satisfied the aforesaid William has at all events left this immediate jurisdiction, you have my full permission to search these premises. Advance! Proceed whither thou wilt!"

The men made a thorough exploration of the premises, especially the cellar, and finally returned to Dibbs with the hope of eliciting some information from him that would put them on the track of the fugitive. All their attempts were of no avail. Dibbs simply reiterated his assertion of proprietorship, backing it up with free and copious drinks. These potations effectually closed further discussion on the part of the officers, and after a while they reluctantly took their departure, vowing that the new proprietor of the Golden Bowl was a scholar and a gentleman.

It might have been an hour later. The handbill and the placards had been removed from the window; the floor was newly sanded, the chairs and tables in order. Already the name of "The Golden Bowl" and the golden bowl itself had been scratched from the glass by the huge jack-knife of William Dibbs, who in his shirt-sleeves was working these changes with vigorous alacrity.

"Now, Spike my boy," he said, pausing in his efforts and winking at the bird, whose cage was hung behind the bar, "you wait till to-morrow, and you will see an attractive frontispiece to this saloon—"

He was interrupted by the entrance of three men, who seated themselves at one of the tables and called for lager. They were evidently so engrossed in their conversation that they did not notice the unfamiliar personage that waited upon them. Placing the glasses in front of them, Dibbs withdrew without catching so much as a glance of any of their eyes.

"Professionals," whispered Lanty, who came in at this moment and joined his master behind the bar. "Setting up a game."

Dibbs' countenance was a marvel of innocence as he moved indifferently toward the end of the counter, where he could overhear the men. While apparently engaged in arranging bottles his keen ears were on the alert. Listening thus for some time, he heard nothing he could understand, except the fact that these men were planning some villainy. At last words fell upon his hearing that made him chuckle away down to the end of his boots.

"Yes, Sladey must have made a ten-strike somewhere," said one of the men. "I never knew him to be so flush."

"I'm glad of it," put in another. "Seth Slade has had rough luck these last three years. Seems as if fortune is bound to sit down on a good-hearted fellow. I say, though, boys, it's right clever in Sladey to set out that treat for us down at the Shades to-morrow."

"Sladey was always good on the divide," spoke up the first man. "I recollect, when he raised that cheque on old man Adams four years ago, he gave the boys almost every dollar of it in treats."

"Yes, I remember that raise. It was beautifully done,"

laughed the third man. "Sladey said then there was luck in the name Adams, and the next week he was out West, traveling on the community as J. Lawrence Adams. Yes, Sladey is a trump! Give him a fair show, and I'll bet on him every time."

"Let's drink a bumper to him and go," said the first speaker.

As the glasses were refilled by Lanty he continued in a lower voice, "Here's to Nature's nobleman, Seth Slade and J. Lawrence Adams, one and indivisible, now and for ever! Eh, boys?"

The toast finished, the men threw their score on the table and went boisterously out into the street through the rear entrance.

"Lanty," quickly said Dibbs, catching the lad by the shoulder as the men disappeared, "do you know where the Shades is?"

"Of course I do," said the boy with a droll wink. "I keep the run of all the saloons. There will be a chance for me to buy one of them out some day. But not any of the Shades for me, if you please."

"Why not?" asked Dibbs.

"Because it's a hard crowd that lays around there. If any of them go for you, you are gone, sure."

"Indeed!" muttered Dibbs to himself, turning away and beating a tattoo on the bar with his fingers. "Well, I must see that crowd to-morrow night and give them a little surprise. In the mean time, I will hunt up Grundle. If he comes down handsomely with a reward, Sladey shall be put in his power; if not, Sladey shall remain in mine. Eh, Spike?" While he was thus meditating, his eye caught sight of a young female standing in front of the window.

"Whew!" he exclaimed; "that's a beautiful specimen of female architecture. Who is she, Lanty?" noticing the telegraphic signals that were passing between the lad and the girl.

"That's Charity Sterrit, the sweetest girl that ever swung on a back gate, I vow."

"She is a beauty, that's a fact," exclaimed Dibbs, starting toward the window with an ogling smile at the damsel,

who turned up her nose at him in response, and walked slowly away. "I have seen women act that way before," said Dibbs, returning to the bar. "When a woman turns up her nose at a man, it's a sure sign that if he keeps at her long enough she will one day turn up her lips to him. Eh, Spike?—Lanty, tell that beauteous female that I await the pleasure of an introduction to her."

CHAPTER XLII.

CLOSING SCENES—SCENE FIRST.

SITTING-ROOM in the old farm-house at Slowville. The two women are seated by the fireplace, one in front, the other by the chimney-jamb. The clock strikes eight as an easily-recognized step is heard coming up the walk. After a sudden and heavy knock the door opens. Patrick Doyle enters, his face brimming over with smothered laughter.

"God save ye kindly, ladies!" he said, pulling off his hat, and making a sweeping bow with it. "Throth, it's late I am comin' wid the phost-offis, but it's dyin' fur laughter I wur this long time at the village beyant. Shure, it's the moighty sharp lawyer that has throuble now, wid the widder Boozer afther him. Indade, it's thrashin' owld Craft intirely she wor this afthernoon wid her own umbrelly in his own offis. Faix, I'm towld the lawyer ran down the street loike a fox, wid her flyin' afther him an' latherin' his skull wid the broken umbrelly-handle, which, be the token, was all that was left in the powerful fist o' her. Oh, be the powers! it's not gittin' off so aisy as that he'll be at all, at all. She's too much for him, wid all his larnin'. Indade she is! It's marryin' her he'll be doin', if he wants to dhraw a peaceful breath agin this side o' the grave."

"Have you any letters for us?" asked Mrs. Gagger a trifle impatiently.

"Indade have I," he replied with a triumphant smile,

pulling two letters from out the depths of his pocket, "and here they are. One fur ye, Misthress Gagger, and one fur ye, Misthress Loyd," handing an epistle to each.

"You may sit in the other room until we retire for the night, Patrick," said Mrs. Gagger, motioning him in the direction of the kitchen.

After the man had gone into the adjoining apartment and closed the door, the women lost no time in reading the letters and discussing their contents. The one to Mrs. Gagger ran thus:

"DEAR MADAM: I take on myself the entire responsibility of writing to you in reference to your husband, Mr. Silas Gagger. He is a lodger in my house, and has been quite sick ever since he came here. Yesterday he was taken seriously ill. The doctor says he may recover and he may not. Just now your husband needs the kindest care; and while I am doing all I can for him, I know it is not what his wife could do were she here.

"From his nephew Silas, who is an old boarder of mine, I have learned your direction. I write to you, utterly ignorant of what has caused your husband's temporary separation from you. My object is simply to let you know how very sick the man is whom you one day vowed before Heaven you would love, cherish and obey. If he should die, you will forgive me this familiarity; for I know that these honest words of mine must bring you to him. Should he live, let us hope your coming to him will be the means of your speedy mutual reconciliation.

"Yours, very respectfully,

"MRS. STERRIT."

The letter to Aziel was this:

"MY DEAR, DARLING AZIEL: Oh, I am so happy with Volney. He makes me call him Volney, but it is very hard to do it, he's such a great big man, and I am such a little bit of a woman. Dear me! dear me! I can't believe I'm married. It is just like a beautiful dream. My heart sings all day long. I wish you were here to see what a sweet cosy room we have. Mrs. Joy—she has a very smart boy, named Lanty—says our room is worth a great deal more than she asks Volney to pay for it. Isn't she very kind to us? Dear good soul! I hope some day very soon we shall be able to pay her back a hundredfold.

"Dear me! I wish I could work, so as to help dear Volney! It is so very hard when you want to assist those you love, and you cannot find any way of doing it. Volney says my love is enough for me to do for him. Isn't he a sweet boy to say that?

"Oh, I'm so very, very happy! Volney loves me so! And he says that in a few days I shall see father again. Was there ever such a dear Volney? I cry every time Volney comes home from the mill, I love him so.

"P. S.—Oh, dear Aziel, yesterday I had to stop writing, I was so frightened. A man who said he was Reddie Stitt came to see me while

Volney was at the mill. He told me there was a big strike at the mill, and Volney was the only man willing to work, and that Volney would be in very great danger if he should go to the meeting of the strikers next Saturday night.

"Mr. Stitt said that he liked Volney and did not want to see him hurt, and that I had better keep him away from the meeting. I told Volney this when he came home. At first he only laughed, and then he looked so fierce that he frightened me. He said he would go to the meeting even if he should be killed at it. I cried and begged, but it was of no use. Volney said it was his duty and his right to go to the meeting, and he was going.

"Oh dear! oh dear! what shall I do? Can't you come right away and help me keep Volney from going to that meeting? He will be killed—I know he will! Oh dear! oh dear! I'm so excited I can't write any more. Do come, dear Aziel! You can persuade him to stay away from those wicked, cruel men—I know you can. A thousand sweet kisses for you.

Your affectionate friend,

"EMILY GRUNDLE SLADE.

"P. S.—Doesn't that name look funny? Volney says it's a sweet name. I know the last word is. But, oh dear! I'm so excited about dear Volney! You will come to us right away, won't you, dear Nancy?"

"What are you going to do?" asked Mrs. Gagger as Aziel finished reading this letter aloud.

"I shall go to Philadelphia this very night," was the quick and firm reply. "And you?"

"I hardly know what to answer," said the other.

"Will you be advised by me?" asked Aziel, a serious look upon her face.

"I know what you would say," responded Mrs. Gagger with a weary smile, in which was a trifle of bitterness. "You would have me forgive and forget?"

"Yes," replied Aziel, her voice full of emotion, "forgive and forget before the grave, perhaps, makes both impossible."

The train that sped eastward this same night bore among its passengers two women—sad faces, both of them, yet on each there now and then flitted a ray of hope like a rift of sunshine rippling over a clouded lake.

CLOSING SCENES—SCENE SECOND.

Twilight is slowly settling upon the city. Men, women and children are hurrying hither and thither, homeward bound. Happy homes are waiting for many of these toilers, to whom the setting sun has brought the hour of rest; miserable homes shall receive the tired feet of others

—homes in which resolution, energy and virtue have all been crushed beneath the despair of a poverty that had looked everywhere in vain for help, though seeking it with prayers and tears. Not one in all this steady throng, save here and there a pitying eye, stops to look at yonder old blind man and his dog plodding along their weary way. Perhaps one who knew him well could have recognized Nicholas Grundle, despite his green spectacles, his torn and tattered clothes, his weak, shuffling gait, and the trembling hand that could scarcely hold the chain by which the dog was leading him. But certainly no one could have told that this poor mud-daubed creature with the hanging head and depressed stub of a tail was Cæsar. Yet so it was, and it could be seen on a nearer approach that something of the old spirit was still gleaming in his eyes, that warily scanned each side of the street in response to his master's muttered commands.

"Look sharp, Cæsar!" the old man was now saying with such a sudden thrill in his voice that the dog's ears instantly stood erect and the stub tail vibrated ominously. "Yonder he comes! Yes, yes, Cæsar!" he cried, shaking the white rag at the dog and gesticulating in the direction of a man in the distance, who, just at this moment recognizing the strange couple, wheeled and took to flight.

No need now to show the dog the white rag; no need for his master to urge Cæsar to the pursuit; and as useless also was it for the man to seek to escape by flight, with the mastiff's swiftly-leaping feet so close upon him.

It took only a moment for the whole of this to happen. The fugitive, casting back a frightened glance, suddenly became aware of the extremity of his danger. He stopped, turned quickly and discharged his revolver at the animal so close at hand, whose frothy lips were quivering with rage, and whose sharp teeth gleamed like a wolf's fangs out of his grim red jaws.

The ball sped harmlessly by as the man staggered back with a look of horror, and a roar like that of a lion came defiantly from Cæsar's cavernous mouth, and his eyes were set with the murderous look of a demon, as he poised himself for a deadly spring. It was too late for the man to

fire again—too late, indeed, for help of any kind. No hope of escape now from the fury of this mastiff, already at the very feet of his victim. The man seemed to realize at this instant his awful peril. Dropping the weapon from his nerveless grasp, he turned his head aside with a cry of terror. He tried to cover his agonized face with his hands, but they fluttered so with fear that they concealed only a portion of his features. One gasping breath, and he stood motionless and voiceless, paralyzed with despair. In another second there was a short, fierce roar, a leap in the air, and the horrified spectators saw the man fall upon the sidewalk with the mastiff's fangs buried in his victim's throat. A frightened cry for help rang out on all sides from fleeing men and women. But no one dared approach this terrible struggle for life. The man's voice gurgled into a deathly silence; the dog's growl grew fainter and fainter as his teeth sunk deeper into the quivering white flesh.

Soon there came on the spot the old man, not trembling now, nor blind. The green glasses were no longer on his eyes, which shone with vindictive joy as he leaned over the prostrate form and rubbed his hands with what seemed to all who saw him a fiendish glee. Now, as if satisfied with exultation and suddenly fearful of his victim's death, he called to the dog to loosen his hold. As well might he have told the powerless man to free himself from that deadly grip. Cæsar showed no sign of obedience, but lay motionless, his mouth still clasping the blood-streaming throat. His master, exasperated now, struck him and kicked him and spoke to him in tones of the sharpest command, but neither blows nor kicks nor words had the slightest power to move the dog or loosen his fatal hold in the least. At last, Grundle with an oath snatched up the revolver, which had fallen from the man's hand, and fired at the dog. The ball pierced Cæsar's shoulder. With a cry of pain he let go his grip and turned toward his master. Then, as if he considered that such a cruel return for his fidelity absolved him from further fealty, he slowly turned away with a growl of contempt and strode up the street, disappearing just as a policeman came upon the scene.

"Where is my money? Give it to me! Tell me where it is!" were the fiercely-spoken words of the old man, whom the officer found kneeling beside the prostrate form and roughly shaking it.

"What's all this?" exclaimed the policeman, thrusting Grundle aside and examining the wounded man. "This is a run go. Here! bring me a wheelbarrow. We must get this man to a drug-store, or he will bleed to death. Hurry up, some of you loafers," addressing the men who had gathered around, "or Sandy Grill will put a couple of you in the lock-up over-night for not assisting an officer in the discharge of his duty."

At this moment there was a stir in the rear of the awe-struck, silent crowd. A little woman who had been fluttering wildly around the outskirts of the circle now pushed her way swiftly through the group that surrounded the policeman and Grundle and the bleeding man who lay at their feet. Face to face with Nicholas Grundle came Mrs. Sterrit. A wild cry rang from her lips. Her face grew ghastly white as that of the old man, who shrank away from her as if she were indeed a spectre. He put out his hands with a wild motion. She came closer and closer; then, clasping her hands, cried in a voice that thrilled every heart,

"Oh, John! John! Do you not know me?"

He swayed to and fro; whiter grew his face; he tried to speak, but his lips muttered words unintelligible as the frightened glance of his eyes. Then, with something like a groan, he threw up his arms, and would have fallen had not the little woman, with the aid of the sympathizing spectators, caught him in her arms and pressed him to her bosom. But as she looked into his face with her eyes so blinded with tears of joy that she could scarcely distinguish his features, a convulsive shudder passed suddenly over his frame, and he fell motionless at her feet. Sandy Grill hurried away with the wounded man, while four men bore the speechless Nicholas Grundle into the home of Mrs. Sterrit. The little woman followed close beside the silent form of him who had so strangely come back to her, holding his hand firmly and lovingly in her own. There was a smile of mingled joy and resignation on her

sweet face as they laid him down upon the lounge and the doctor said to her that he would live, but it would be many days before he would recover his mind. It was indeed apparent, from the vacant look and silly laugh with which the old man was now looking around him, that his reason had left him, for the present at least.

CLOSING SCENES—SCENE THIRD.

It was Reddie Stitt who was speaking. The rays of the setting sun were brightening his rough features, almost hiding the scowl that rested upon them. He was leaning on the fence in front of Mrs. Joy's cottage, talking earnestly to a woman who was replying as emphatically to him.

"It is of no use to argue the matter, Miss Loyd," he was saying; "I only tell you what I know. The hands will not let Volney Slade speak, and if he attempts it to-night, he will get hurt, and badly hurt. It's a sorry thing all around that he persisted in going to work at the mill. It only made matters worse, for all hands struck then, as I told him they would. It is strange he cannot see how his coming here has injured our cause."

"It is very strange that you people cannot let a man work when, where and for what he chooses," she replied, a slight sneer in her even voice. "Capital could be guilty of no greater tyranny. You even deny one of your own number freedom of speech, and threaten him with bodily harm if he dares to tell you his convictions as to right and wrong in this controversy between capital and labor."

"I tell you it is of no use to argue the question," stoutly rejoined the man. "The world is as it is, and we must take it so until it becomes better. People have their opinions, and hold to them, right or wrong. I tell you the hands are down on Volney for coming here. They will not let him speak. I know what that means; and if you want this young man to save a broken skull, you and his little chit of a wife had better persuade him to stay at home to-night. I come and tell you this as his friend. I like his pluck, and for that reason feel kind to-

ward him, though he wouldn't believe me if I should swear it to him."

"There he comes," said Aziel, pointing in the direction of a young man walking with thoughtful, downcast air toward them. "Suppose you tell him, Mr. Stitt, what you have been saying to me. I am sure he will listen to reason."

"No; not from me," answered the man with a derisive smile, moving away; "for if he had listened to me, he would not to-day be the only hand working at the mill. Humph! as if he was the only one among us that knows what is right!"

Reddie Stitt, with a contemptuous fling of his head, strode slowly away toward his home.

"What! you here, Aziel?" was the young man's surprised greeting as the woman ran to meet him.

He shook her hand with a cordial welcome that banished the hesitating, doubtful expression from her face as she answered:

"Yes, thank Heaven, I am here! For, Volney, I fear I have come none too soon to warn you of the danger you are in."

"He has been alarming you, I see," said Volney, nodding at the retreating form of Reddie Stitt; "but do not fear, Aziel, that I shall ever become a coward or hesitate to speak the truth because there is danger in so doing."

They had passed through the gate. A girlish form darted from the door of the cottage, and rushed into the young man's arms with a little cry of joy.

"I cannot wait any longer," murmured Emily, clinging closely to him, her bright, loving eyes fixed upon his face. "Aziel made me promise not to come out until she had talked with you by herself a little while, but I couldn't wait another minute; could I, Volney dear?"

"Of course not," he replied with a laugh. "I should have felt very much disappointed if you had not run to meet me."

He kissed away the tears of unspeakable joy that stole out of her tender eyes, saying, as he released her from his arms,

"Come, let us go into the house. I have much to ask you, Aziel," turning to her eagerly watching them with a yearning look, "of matters and things at Slowville—"

He was interrupted by a half-suppressed scream from Emily, who had darted into the street, and in another instant was kneeling on the ground with the head of a huge dog held fast in her arms.

"It is Cæsar—dear, good Cæsar! He has come from father!" she was crying hysterically as her companions ran to her side and immediately recognized the mastiff. "See, poor fellow! he is hurt!" she said, looking sorrowfully at his wounded shoulder, covered with blood. "But you know me. Don't you, dear old dog?" she went on, nestling her cheek upon his head, as he whined and licked her face and the stub tail vigorously wagged with joy.

The mastiff seemed in the midst of his pleasure to have suddenly bethought himself of his duty; for he instantly ceased all demonstrations of joy, sprang from his young mistress' arm, and with bark and whine and growl ran back and forth in the direction from which he had first come. Then, seizing Emily's dress, he pulled and tugged at it, and in his own way—as intelligible as any language of man could have been—begged her to come with him. She followed him with swift, eager steps, knowing full well that he was leading her to her father. With her went Volney and Aziel, their faces as troubled and perplexed as that of the girl was happy and radiant. She felt certain, from Cæsar's joyous bark as he looked back at her, that he was trying to tell her that her father was alive and well. The dog led them on through street and alley and byway, and across a long stretch of vacant land that intervened between this suburb and the great metropolis that lay beyond it. At last they came into the city itself, and Cæsar still walked onward, steadily, sturdily, silently, his huge body swaying from side to side, his feet falling upon the sidewalk with a measured tread, and the stub tail wagging slowly and at regular intervals.

There was occasionally something of a merry gleam in the dog's eyes despite their malicious glare, as if, forsooth,

he were well aware of the great surprise he had in store for the silent group who were following him.

"Hello! what all this?" asked Sandy Grill, accosting the little party as they halted and intently watched Cæsar. The dog was running his nose over the sidewalk, where splotches of blood were still visible, barking and whining, and looking around and showing the greatest disappointment. "Do you know that dog?" continued the officer, addressing Volney, whom he had as yet failed to recognize.

"I know the dog as well as I know you, Mr. Grill," said the young man, putting out his hand, which the policeman took with a laugh of recognition.

"Oh yes; you are the boy that helped a countryman to pay his debt. I remember it all now—valise full of paper and wood. Took you to station-house. You found money in your pocket; put there by your old nurse. Rum story, but I guess it was true."

"Indeed it was true. Here is the nurse herself, and also my wife.—Ladies, Mr. Sandy Grill, who was a friend to me when I needed a friend."

The women smiled on Sandy Grill, and shook his hand and thanked him so sweetly for what he had done that he blushed redder than the cardinal necktie he wore Sundays, and vowed to them that he was paid a thousand times over for what little he had done that night for Volney.

"Mr. Grill, can you tell us anything about an old man whom this dog was in company with a little while ago?" questioned Volney as Cæsar began darting up and down the street, and at last threw himself with a fierce bark against the door of a small house a trifle in the distance.

"Go straight to that house where you now see the dog, and you will find the old man. Is he any relation of yours?"

"No; but he is of my wife," replied Volney, pointing at Emily, who had already swiftly moved away in the direction of the house, where Cæsar's barking grew the louder.

"Well, it's the strangest go I've seen since I've been on the force. From all I can find out, the old man was walking along just here, with his dog leading him, as if he was

blind. All of a sudden the dog leaped at the throat of a very fine-looking gentleman and threw him to the ground. Then the old man suddenly took off his green glasses and hissed on the dog. He talked to himself as if he was being revenged on the man who was being bitten to death by the dog. At last the old man must have repented of what he was telling the dog to do, so he tried to pull the dog off, but the dog not being willing to let go his hold, the old man shot him, and the dog ran away. I came on hand just then. And while I was trying to tie up the man's throat—it was awfully mangled—the old lady that lives in that house yonder where the dog is barking came running through the crowd, and as soon as she set eyes on the old man she knew who he was, and he was so scared at seeing her that he dropped in her arms as if dead. I just came from the house. They told me there the old man has gone clean crazy, and is looking out of his eyes this very minute with as much sense as a dead mackerel."

The door of the small house had opened while he was speaking. The dog sprang in past the figure of the little woman on the threshold, who, as she saw Emily, threw up her hands with a startled cry, and then tottered back out of sight, swiftly followed by the pursuing form of the girl.

"Another rum go!" exclaimed Sandy Grill with a laugh. "Regular theatre round here now. Emotional and sensational drama in forty-'leven acts. Eh?"

"What has become of that other man?" quickly asked Aziel of the policeman as Volney darted away toward the dwelling into which Emily had so strangely disappeared. "Is he dangerously hurt?" she managed to add, though her voice was very unsteady and she felt a deathly faintness stealing over her in dread of the officer's reply.

"Yes. I had to take him down to the hospital," replied Grill, looking curiously at the scared face, white and partly averted. "The doctor shook his head when he saw him, and I guess he will have to pass in his chips this time, certain. Fine-looking fellow, though; may be a gentleman, though he has the gambler's cut."

"Where is the hospital?" she asked, her voice fainter, though her heart beat violently and her breath came

and went in heavier and thicker volumes, stifling and slow.

"St. Joseph's. I will show you—"

She had left his side like a flash. Before he could recover from his surprise she had darted around the corner and was gone.

"The plot thickens," said Sandy Grill. "And such being the case, I will go up to the Golden Bowl between the acts and see what kind of a spirit-mixer that new landlord is."

CLOSING SCENES—SCENE FOURTH.

"It is against the rules," the young physician was saying, "but as you are so near a relative of his, I cannot deny your request. You will find him in yonder cot," pointing to the extreme end of the long line of beds. "You must be careful and not excite him or let him talk too much. The artery is badly lacerated, and is liable to rupture under any violent or unusual exertion. His situation is precarious. You will be very cautious?"

The woman shook her head with a quick affirmative gesture, murmured her thanks, and went swiftly down the hospital ward, her eyes fixed on the distant bed with a mingled expression of eagerness and fear. As she advanced nearer to it she laid her hand upon her heart, and stood suddenly still with a gasp of half-suppressed agony; for in the light of the dimly-burning gas she saw the closed and sunken eyes of him she knew so well, his ashy, bloodless face made more deadly pale by his black locks, that clustered in straying curls about his cheeks and temples. Entirely covering his throat was a broad white bandage. This, with his pallid hands crossed upon his breast, completed the semblance of death that had at first sight so agitated the woman.

Stifling her sobs as best she could, she drew closer to him and tried to speak his name calmly. But how could she be calm with him dying, doubtless, before her very eyes? Her voice came in a little despairing cry from her lips, that quivered beyond control.

"You here?" he said so composedly that for an instant

a faint gleam of hope crossed the dreadful apprehension of her face. "Ah, Agnes, I knew you would come. Something seemed to tell me you would soon be here."

He had put out his hand gropingly as he called her Agnes, and a brighter, though softened, light shone in his eyes. His cold grasp held her trembling palm close to his cheek, while his gaze fastened itself upon her face with a wan smile of gratitude and recognition. Overcome by his utterance of that name and speechless with grief at the sight of his deathly appearance, she had fallen upon her knees beside the couch. Weeping bitterly, she was stroking the hair back from the damp, cold forehead, while he gently and tremulously kissed the hand he had slowly and with evident effort pressed to his lips.

"Seth—"

She tried to talk to him, to tell him how she still loved him in spite of all he had done to make her hate him—yes, loved him now far more even than when, in the years long since past, she had indeed been his Agnes and loved him with all the abandon of young love's devotion. Though she could not speak to him, so great was her emotion, her lips tenderly pressed his forehead, and her eyes, looking so yearningly into his, told him of her deep, true love far better than words could have done. A heavy sigh came from his lips. He looked into her face eagerly, but despair and remorse followed each other in slow succession across his features. Again there came to his face the kindly smile with which he had at first greeted her, though now there was a deeper meaning in it—a suggestion of restitution—as he said, with calmness,

"Agnes, I am so very glad you have come to me. It is very late, I know, for me to try to undo my past wickedness toward you. You will forgive me now, when I speak to you from the very brink of the grave?"

She interrupted him with a half-articulate cry of agony, and besought him not to speak of death.

"No, no, no!" she went on, frantically pressing his hands to her bosom, and covering his white lips with kisses and scalding tears, "you are not dying, Seth! No,

no, you shall not die! You shall get well. 'I will nurse you day and night.'

He gently caressed her cheek with his hand, patting it and wiping away the tears falling so fast from her eyes that looked down upon him with an agony of yearning.

"Ever the same Agnes!" he said, softly drawing her head down upon the pillow beside his own—"so full of love and forgiveness! Ah! if I had listened to you in those evil days, what happiness might have been ours! But I was not so bad as you thought me, Agnes—no, not nearly so wicked as I made you believe. Listen," he resumed with something of his old air of triumph lingering in his voice; "you must strike off one of my crimes from your catalogue of my sins. You were legally married to me, Agnes, in that little old country church. The man who performed the ceremony was a genuine minister, and not a personation by one of my friends, as I told you afterward when you would not consent to my marriage with the heiress. You *were* my wife then, and," he went on, a trifle excitedly, "you *are* my wife now. Though I put you away from me with a lie, and married that woman only to hate her, you have been my legal wife ever since the moment we left that little church so very happy. Oh, Agnes!" his voice growing feebler and husky, "you will forgive me? Tell me that I leave this world with your forgiveness and blessing following me into that unknown Beyond whose dark shadow seems already coming over my eyes!"

"Forgive you, dear Seth?" She wildly threw her arms about him and covered his ashen face with kisses that her quivering lips could scarcely form. "There is nothing for me to forgive, dear, dear Seth! You always loved me—you were always kind to me. It was not you that deserted me," she continued, trying to force a tone of smoothness into her broken, vibrating voice. "It was some evil spirit that took you from me. You are all mine now; you have come back to me. I knew you would. We shall be happy now together. You shall not die. We will go far away where we can live at last happy only in ourselves; and our son Volney, dear Seth, shall come and see us, and we will tell him all,

and he will forgive us the past just as freely as I forgive you, my own dear husband."

"God bless you for those words!" he murmured, drawing her closer to him, if closer she could be, with her wet face already pressed against his cheek. "My heart feels lighter now. Oh, if I had only listened to you, Agnes, in those days—in those days! But look!" as she suddenly raised herself and bent over him with a gaze of startled fear; "how dark it is growing! I cannot see your face, Agnes, so well as I did. Are they putting out the lights?"

"You must not die!" she gasped, bending still lower and gazing with speechless agony into those eyes that steadily looked up at her with a smile that grew fainter and fainter. "Seth, dear Seth, speak to me once more!"

She spoke in a hollow whisper that brought back for an instant the smile, for an instant the look of gratitude in his half-closed eyes, that slowly opened and as slowly sought her face with a soft sigh escaping his lips. His hand fluttered across the bed as if in search of something. "Give me your hand," he whispered. "Let me hold it while I sleep." He took the hand she scarcely had strength enough to place in his icy-cold fingers and pressed it to his lips with a long, lingering kiss. Then, with a peaceful smile, he laid her open palm beneath his cheek, looked up at her with a loving glance, and wearily closed his eyes.

"It is very dark, dear wife," she heard him murmuring as his fingers stiffened about her hand, held so closely to his cheek. "I should be so afraid if you were not with me, Agnes. Keep near me, darling. It is so cold and dark. But I hear your voice calling to me, softly speaking my name in the darkness. Ah! there is your loving face!" as she pressed her last passionate kisses upon his lips in speechless woe. "Come closer to me, Agnes. It grows darker still, and cold—so very cold! Good-night, dear wife! Kiss me good-night! I am tired. I must—sleep—now."

Softer and softer came his breath; colder grew the fingers elinging to the woman's hand; fainter was the smile upon his cheek. Nor was it at all like the evil smile of

old, but rather like that of a child sinking to slumber with its mother's voice lulling it to rest. The slightest tremor stole over his features. Then there was that utter and awful stillness about him that told not of sleep, no matter how profound, but of death—that lasting sleep for the awakening from which love's eager watching ever waits in vain.

The woman made no outcry. Throwing herself with a frantic motion upon the bed, she put her arms about him and laid his rigid face close to her own pallid cheeks. Thus holding fast to him, she became as motionless as the dead body clasped to her bosom. Her intense mental suffering found no expression in exclamations or gestures or tears. There was no longer either stir or motion in her form. Rigid and lifeless as sculptured marble she lay there, her hand still resting in his cold clasp, her lips so close to his. Not even on her marriage-day had this hand been given to him with so much sacrificing and enduring affection as it now lay throbbing with unutterable longings in his palm, stretching forth its last grasp from the very grave itself. Nor had her bridal kiss ever told him of love like this with which she pressed his dead lips.

O woman, how enduring, how compassionate, how forgiving, thy love!—type, indeed, of that divine love which the ingratitude of man has no power to destroy!

CLOSING SCENES—SCENE FIFTH.

Its most regular and devoted customer could never have recognized the Golden Bowl by its present exterior. A sudden transformation in one day it had been, arousing the attention and curiosity of every woman and child in the neighborhood, while the men, equally alert, were losing no time in gratifying their own closer inquisitiveness, as the well-filled saloon had all day testified. The wood-work of bulkhead and window-sash and door no longer flared in red, but had been painted a pure white, relieved here and there with lines and tracings of gold. Even the red lamp over the door had been removed and its place supplied by one of blue and white glass. Nor had the blank wall on the outside been neglected, but it also had

been covered with white paint, and now shone forth with an eminently spotless surface. This new style of saloon decoration was William Dibbs' individual taste—the reflex of what he termed his “natural innocence.”

In response to the remonstrance of the boss painter, who stubbornly argued for red as the best color for the purpose, Dibbs had replied in his own inimitable and voluble manner :

“Red, didst thou say, manipulator of the slowly-moving bunch of bristles? To alter the divine William a trifle,

‘Red is the color of blood,
The hue of fire and the scowl of danger.’

Nay ; rather let the color of my establishment be ‘whiter than new snow on a raven’s back,’ to quote correctly the aforesaid poet. Ay, white is the emblem of purity and innocence. What more appropriate color in which to reflect the quality of my liquors or the character of my business? So proceed, my friend, and paint this visible space as white as an

‘Ethiopian’s tooth, or the famed snow
That’s bolted by the northern blasts twice o’er.’”

Striking as was this unusual color to all passers-by, they were more astonished by the singular name and lettering upon the window where before the golden bowl and Cupids had been the attractive decoration.

Upon the window was now drawn the following, in gold letters shaded with soft lines of black :

THE WESTERN HEMISPHERICAL HORA BIBENDI.

Ne plus ultra potations for all who—

[For the meaning of the above dash, interrogate the sign upon the mural surface within.]

Adding greater mystery to the meaning of this announcement was the changed and singular appearance of the inner floor of the window. Here, instead of an array of all kinds of bottles and cigar-boxes and illuminated cards, was a horticultural and aquarial display very creditable for so small a place. In the centre of a bed of fresh green moss stood a miniature aquarium, in which

gold and silver fish dreamily glided or flashed their brilliant colors in the sparkling sunlight, while floating on a chip a tiny turtle lay basking in a sunbeam. Surrounding the aquarium was a circle of growing flowers, all in bloom, and as tastefully arranged in form and color as if an artist's hand, guided by an artist's eye, had placed them there. In each of the four corners stood a full-blown calla-lily, while all over the white blinds that shut out all sight of the business region beyond clambered a luxuriant vine. Nor on entering the saloon did one find the interior less inviting than this cheerful window, so suggestive of Nature's happiest moments by field and brook and wood. Here everything bristled with cleanliness, keen-eyed and scrupulous. The walls had been newly papered, the wood-work painted, the tables and chairs vigorously scrubbed. Even Lanty's face and raiment had undergone a sudden change. In clean linen and a new suit—a present from his new boss—he was shining clear as the glistening of the bottles and glasses and the polish of the large mirror behind the bar. Just in the centre of this mirror, in conspicuous golden letters, were the words :

Meaning of the dash : pay for them.

After a few moments of reflection the reader would add this meaning to the line upon the window, and repeating to himself, "Ne plus ultra potations for all who—pay for them," would call it a good joke, and invite the new landlord to take a drink in honor of his witticism. Dibbs always accepted the invitation, pouring out his own drink from a decanter which he kept beneath the counter. This decanter held a liquid which he said was the only whiskey he could drink. It was, however, a mixture of molasses and water especially prepared by Dibbs for his own use, in order that he might find no difficulty in accepting all offers to drink at the expense of his customers. Did any customer ask for a taste of this peculiar whiskey, Dibbs cheerfully assented. Deftly bringing to view a similar decanter, which he always kept hidden with his own for such an emergency, he would pour out the same whiskey his customer had just been drinking.

Spike was not less popular than his master. Hanging in his new cage from the ceiling in front of the mirror, he blinked and whistled at the two mottoes that adorned the wall on each side of him. These mottoes were as follows :

“Wine that maketh glad the heart of man.”

“Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake, and thine often infirmities.”

Notwithstanding so gross a misapplication of Scripture, Dibbs was at this moment pointing to these texts with pride, and thus addressing his patrons, many of whom thought the quotations were from *Poor Richard’s Almanac* :

“Gentlemen, those are verses which you will find in any Bible you may be able to borrow from your friends. I have elevated them in yonder conspicuous position, not so much as an encouragement to your temperate potations, but rather as a withering rebuke to that portion of the community who defame *fructus frumenti optimus* as the enemy of man, and preach total abstinence as the salvation of the world. Banish wine from the world ! No more relief for the feeble stomach, the weary brain, the gloomy mind, the saddened heart, the quivering nerves, the feeble muscles—”

Dibbs’ oratory was here interrupted by the entrance of a group of angry-looking men. He soon learned that they were a committee from the strikers of Marsh’s mill, and that they were returning from an unsuccessful interview with their employer at his own residence.

“Gentlemen,” suddenly cried Dibbs with a generous flourish of his hand and a smile beaming with sympathy, “as a friend of the workingman, down-trodden, oppressed and enslaved, with the iron heel of capital grinding his neck in the dust, I bid you welcome to the *Hora Bibendi*. Eat, drink and be merry. Let not considerations of filthy lucre restrain your appetites, for it is my noble pleasure that you masticate the crackers and cheese and imbibe the elevating fluid at my expense.”

This invitation was at first received with curious and hesitating silence ; but when Lanty, acting somewhat as a short-hand reporter of his employer’s speech, cried out,

"He means free drinks for all. Set 'em up! What shall it be?" the crowd broke out into deafening cheers, and a moment later were silently drinking beer, not a few eyes among the group fixed admiringly on Dibbs.

"It's plainly to be seen you are a friend of the laboring-man," said one of the men, addressing Dibbs. "We are much obliged for your kindness, and will not forget it. The working-man, sir," laying his hand impressively on his breast, "has a heart that seldom forgets a benefit, and always remembers an injury."

"Gentlemen," said Dibbs, looking around upon the group with profound admiration, and throwing his arm upward with a gesture most majestic, "this is the proudest moment of my life, surrounded as I am, for the first time, by such a glorious array of the noblest product of animated nature—the workingman. Ay, in your most noble countenances I see the personification of the spirit of Labor—that spirit to which the world owes everything, its plenty, its comfort, its elegance—ay, its very existence. Yes, my noble sons of toil, it is Labor, and Labor alone, that has made the world what it is. By Labor was the universe created, with its millions of starry worlds and its thousand controlling and sustaining laws! Not only was our own magnificent planet the product of divine labor, but by human labor only, supplemented by divine Providence, has it been able to make the slightest progress in science, literature and arts—ay, even in morals and philosophy.

"Hail, glorious, godlike, invincible Labor! Thou hast built the world's cities, felled its forests, navigated its rivers, opened its mines, tunneled its mountains, ploughed its mighty acres, reaped its broad-spreading harvests, ribbed its plains and valleys with bands of steel that carry the swiftly-flying train that annihilates time and distance. Thou hast brought continents together in a close electric kiss that vibrates beneath the seas—ay, and covered the vast ocean itself with the white wings of commerce, that shine on every billow and gleam even now on the far-off waves of the polar sea.

"And what, may I ask in the name of you horny-handed, rugged-faced sons of toil, has Capital done for

the benefit of this world? What has bloated and lecherous and vampire-sucking Capital done to make this world of ours one whit better since that day when an all-wise Creator said unto our antediluvian progenitors, 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread'? Ay, for what are we indebted to Capital except for all the want and misery and crime in the world? Has not thieving and insatiable Capital built our prisons, our almshouses, and insane asylums, where it could pitilessly thrust its victims out of sight? Ay, Capital, with its steeled heart and bloody hand, has ever been the oppressor of the poor, the robber of the widow, the despoiler of the orphan. Not content with the cries of anguish its gigantic and oppressive monopolies have wrung from the parched and hungry lips of Labor, it has forged upon the noble working-man of America the fetters of a bondage worse than slavery, and forces even the sweat of death from the brow of Labor—"

Again were Dibbs' forensic efforts interrupted, this time by the loud applause of his audience, and also by the appearance of Sandy Grill, his star glittering upon his breast and his baton held aloft with an ominous flourish. The policeman had eagerly seized upon the present uproar to enter the saloon and exercise his authority, which he did by ordering the room to be cleared.

"Rather too much noise, landlord," said Sandy Grill to Dibbs when they were alone, for Lanty too had disappeared. "Neighbors will complain. This place, you know, has had a bad name a long time. I hope you will do a quieter business than Billy the Cleaver. Ah! I see you have put in a side door," glancing toward this new place of exit.

"Yes," said Dibbs, dextrously mixing a most enticing drink and extending it toward the policeman; "that door is like some people's prayer-books—to be used only on Sunday. But here's to your health, most worthy bulwark of the municipal law!" touching the other's glass with his own and smacking his lips over his molasses and water. "May our acquaintance ripen into friendship! Thou and thy associates of the locust art ever welcome to the Hora Bibendi. For listen, knight of the silver star;

the laboring-man, who makes the laws, and the policeman, who executes them, are noble objects of admiration to yours truly. Sir, I adore the merit of the humbler classes. I sympathize with the laboring-man in all his many trials. To him are my heart and my pocket-book alike ready and open. While I draw this fleeting breath, the *Hora Bibendi* shall be a sure and pleasant and free refuge for him whose majestic brow is covered with the sweat of daily, honorable and ennobling toil—”

“Where are the cops hiding now?” exclaimed Lanty, who made a sudden reappearing dive through the door; with eyes dilated with excitement and holding both his hands aloft, he slid across the sanded floor.—“Mr. Dibbs, the most awful thing has just happened down the street! A dog has chawed a man’s head right off at the neck, and old Mrs. Sterrit found her uncle dead in the street, and—”

“Just hold up there!” interrupted Sandy Grill with a look of sublime contempt at the lad. “I was an eye-witness of that affair, and you tell it about as straight as one of those newspaper reporters, who make up what they don’t see.” Then, turning to Dibbs, he continued: “But it was the runnest go, though, I’ve seen since I was on the force. I didn’t see the beginning of it, but the way that bull-dog made mince-meat of the man’s throat sent the cold shivers all over me. Some of the people that stood around told me afterward that the old man who owned the dog, and set him on, accused the other man of having robbed him—”

“What kind of a dog was it?” put in Dibbs, his voice betraying no more than ordinary interest in the affair, although his heart beat rapidly under the excitement of his suspicions.

“A thiekset, white dog with black points, cropped ears and a stub tail.”

“What sort of a looking man was it the dog attacked?” still further questioned Dibbs, this time proffering the policeman a cigar.

“A right good-looking fellow, though I don’t believe he ever did an honest day’s work,” replied Sandy Grill between his puffs. “Guess he was nimble with the cards.

Had hands like a woman's—long, white and thin. On one of his fingers was the oddest ring I ever saw—a little snake with red eyes."

"What became of this man?" asked Dibbs, with difficulty steadying his voice. "Was he able to get away by himself?"

"Bless you, no! When I raised him up he was so weak he couldn't have run a race with a turtle if it was to save the rest of his neck. We took him down to St. Joseph's hospital. I guess he will make his last deal and find spades is trumps before the night is over."

"Hello! that is six o'clock!" exclaimed Dibbs, seizing his hat, as a neighboring bell struck the hour. "I must be going. My landlady insists on punctuality, and as I am a new boarder, and wish to make a good impression upon her, I shall conform strictly to her rules. Knight of the locust," waving his quick adieu to the policeman, "the bar is at your disposal.—Lanty, do the honors in my absence."

In another instant Dibbs had gone out and slowly passed the front window. Then, with a quickened pace, he sought a drug-store near at hand. Learning here the location of the hospital the policeman had mentioned, Dibbs directed his swift footsteps toward it. It was not long before his rapid pace had brought him to the place, where he soon gained admittance, having announced himself as the brother of the injured man.

"His wife is a little ahead of you," said the young physician, preceding Dibbs up the darkened flight of stairs and showing him into the faintly-lighted ward, where were the long rows of beds, most of them empty, save a few at the lower end. "Yes, there she is. I can just see her form bending over his cot. You will oblige me by not exciting him, and I think your sister-in-law had better soon leave her husband for the night."

Dibbs, nodding assent as the physician turned away, made his way slowly and softly down the corridor. As he came nearer he recognized who the woman was that leaned over this bed. A single glance at the white face on the pillow was all he took as he drew to one side and concealed himself in a shadowed recess of the wall. Here

he stood, motionless and silent, seeing every movement of these two and few of their words escaping the keenness of his hearing. At first a smile of triumph had played across his features ; but as he saw the man dying, and heard his farewell words, and noted the eagerness with which the woman clung to him, Dibbs' face grew more solemn and sympathetic, and as he turned his face away he found tears stealing down his cheeks despite the self-bantering shrug of his shoulders. When his eyes were clear again, and were once more fastened on the cot, he saw with a little start how quiet they both were, lying there so close together. Then he knew the Angel of Death had quickly passed that way, and that he and the spirit of the man had gone hand in hand into the infinite Beyond.

It was Dibbs' quick yet firm voice that roused the woman at last, and made her give utterance to a long, weary moan.

"Come, Miss Loyd," he said, gently raising her from the bed, "allow me to extend my aid and sympathy. Excuse my abruptness," he went on as she gazed silently up at him with a dazed look of recognition, "but you should remember now that you have a duty to the living. Your son's lawful father must make restitution of Nicholas Grundle's money through us. It will not do to delay this one moment. Success lies in instant action."

"Oh, if I only knew where to find the money, it should be given back to him this very night!" she cried piteously, wringing her hands and bending over the dead face. "If he had lived, he would have told me.—Would you not, dear, dear Seth?" she went on hysterically, patting the pallid cheek, upon which still rested the faint smile of his parting.

"Do you wish me to act for you in this matter?" asked Dibbs, touching the woman on the shoulder with a kindly pressure of his hand. "Have I your authority to go in search of that property, taking whatever steps I choose to get possession of it?"

"Do go and find it for me," she said imploringly ; for as she turned to him she saw by his countenance that he knew where the property was.

"Will you go with me, or stay here till I return?" he

asked quickly, glancing in the direction of the young physician, who was coming toward them.

"I will stay here," was her quiet reply as she slowly took her seat by the bed, and with a stifled groan reached out her hands toward the lifeless one and laid them upon his own cold palms, folded so calmly upon his breast.

"Remember," said Dibbs, whispering, as he moved away, "not only that you are this man's wife, but that his name is J. Lawrence Adams and I am his brother."

"How is the patient?" asked the physician as Dibbs passed him.

"He's climbed the golden stair," was the blunt and odd reply.

"Dead?" exclaimed the other.

"Physic could make him no deader," said Dibbs with a trifle of a smile. "I wish you would leave my sister alone with him a while. I will return presently, and am going away now to make arrangements as to the disposition of the body."

The physician assented. In less than an hour Dibbs came back to the hospital. Again he roused the woman by the bed. She started with a little cry of alarm, for it seemed to her only a few moments ago that she had parted with him.

"It is all right," he said. "I found his lodgings, and put my hands upon the very trunk containing the miser's property. It is safe in my room now. Come! let us go. I have given the body of our friend into safe and tender keeping for the night. To-morrow you shall see him again. But before any one else knows of his identity you and I must visit that little country church and verify the story he told you. Then, if it prove true—as I feel it must—you can claim your son before the world."

Dibbs felt how these last words made her tremble as she held closely to his arm, but he said no more on the subject, only spoke soothingly to her as she sobbed and cried, groping her way down the corridor, stopping more than once to glance back at the motionless form on the cot.

CLOSING SCENES—SCENE LAST.

Evening in the sitting-room of a substantial cottage in Slowville.

"Oh dear me! I wish I was a widder again! I was some account then. Seems to me men don't care much for their wives after they get them. But poor Boozer did, though. Yes, Boozer was a very attentive husband. He was just like a tender lamb, following me all day long. I wish he was here now, the dear, patient old angel!"

"Madam, allow me to second your wish with all the powers of my harassed and burdened soul," came from the other side of the table. "Nothing would more delight me than that Peter Boozer, the former partner of your matrimonial bosom, were now enjoying that connubial felicity from which death so kindly relieved him, and which has become such an intolerable burden to myself. Allow me to add, my dear madam, that upon your unwomanly eagerness rests the sole responsibility of our present unhappiness. You inveigled me into this social dilemma, from which neither of us can retreat without the most ridiculous public exposure. Alas! alas! If I were only a bachelor again, a million times your fortune would be no temptation to me to tread the vale of life with you—unless, indeed, you were bestowed safely in the bottom of the vale and I meandering serenely on top of the green sward!"

"Rader Craft, you're a bald-headed old fool—that's what you are!" came from the woman, the tones growing ominously angry.

"Then I am well mated with you, if not well married," he rejoined with a sneer, becoming deeply absorbed in his paper.

"Did you say I was bald-headed, you old hypocrite?" cried the woman, springing from her chair and shaking her index finger in his face.

"Certainly not, my dear," was the reply in a voice of assumed tenderness as he fastened his eyes more intently upon the printed page. "Your lovely head is covered with a perennial growth," then lowering his voice, "thanks to the wigmaker."

"What's that you say?" she demanded.

"Nothing."

"Yes, you did!" she persisted.

"No, I didn't."

"I tell you you did!" and she stamped her foot.

"I didn't," he muttered.

"You did!"

"Didn't," he growled half audibly.

She began to cry, and shouted,

• "You did! you did! you did!—did! did! did!"

The relict of Peter Boozer, now the wife of Rader Craft, would have continued this monotonous assertion until her husband sought refuge in the street had not a loud rap upon the door interrupted her. Mrs. Craft crossed the floor, her tears vanishing with astonishing rapidity, and opened the door with a smile. A young man raised his hat with a profound bow, and entered the room with a young woman leaning tenderly upon his arm. In dress, looks and gestures they had the appearance of a recently-married pair.

"William Dibbs, I declare!" exclaimed the lawyer, in his astonishment dropping his paper and eye-glasses at the same time.

"A salutation of mathematical correctness," replied the new-comer. "I indeed rejoice in that aforesaid highly-respectable cognomen. But adopting in the present exigence your illustrious phrase, 'Why need I longer delay? Nor will I!' allow me to present," holding his companion gallantly by the hand and making a sweeping bow by her side, "Mrs. William Dibbs, formerly Miss Charitina Sterritina—a lady whose transcendent beauty, sterling character, diversified culture and comprehensive mind shine with immeasurably increased lustre by comparison with the intellectual, moral and physical deficiencies of yours truly, the fortunate bridegroom."

"Mrs. William Dibbs," said the lawyer, advancing with his bland smile of yore and holding the blushing bride's hand in his oily grasp, "I congratulate you most sincerely upon having formed a matrimonial connection with not only a congenial spirit, but with one of the rising geniuses of the age. Already elected to the legislature from the

birthplace of American liberty, I see in the Honorable William Dibbs one early and fast becoming fitted for positions of national trust and emolument."

"Emolument is good—excellent!" rejoined Dibbs, laying his hand solemnly upon his heart, and looking with a grotesque wink at the lawyer. "I do indeed yearn to serve my country in a fiduciary capacity, and I will make any personal sacrifices for any emolument she might wish to bestow upon my unworthy services.—But prithee, most noble female," turning to Mrs Craft and taking her hand, "how fares thy tender barque upon the matrimonial sea? Art thou sailing under clear blue skies and upon placid, shining waters? or do the black clouds of discontent lower upon the horizon, and the howling wind of discord raise dismal thoughts within thy unquiet soul? Hast thy marital experience already proved to thee the truth of the celestial William's reflection that 'things sweet to taste prove in digestion sour'? or art thou serenely happy in the company of thy noble lord?"

"Oh, we are very, very happy, Mr. Dibbs," said Mrs. Craft, smiling sweetly on her astonished husband. "Of course we have our little spats now and then, as the best of people will, you know. But we are learning each other's ways very fast, Mr. Dibbs."

"I venture the assertion," said Mrs. Dibbs with a little gush of energy as she cast a languishing glance on the lawyer that made his eyes sparkle, "that it would require a decidedly combustible disposition to disagree with Mr. Craft. He has certainly the most heavenly look of resignation that could exist this side of the heavenly portals.—Oh, William," clasping the arm of her husband and gazing up into his eyes with intense adoration, "if you could only add that serene smile to your multitudinous accomplishments, what a paradox you would be!"

"Paragon, my dear," whispered Dibbs, playfully chucking her under the chin. "Remember the dictionary, darling; select your words with precision.—Hem!" addressing the lawyer. "You must pardon for the present, most worthy counselor, any technical errors in my beloved Charitina's vocabulary. Sublunary perfection is ever impossible. The wisest men are not always wise, neither are

the learned free from error. Allow me to observe that in the attainment of rhetorical effects in English and the acquisition of French and German this sweet multiplier of my joys has demonstrated herself as a being of rare linguistic abilities. Ay, and in the exclusive social circles of the great metropolis she is making progress as wonderful as the beauty of her countenance and the capacity of her intellect. Already her vision fails to recognize old acquaintances, and with a pug nestling in her lovely arms she paces the street with the lofty step of a Juno, her gorgeous attire the envy of the entire female population. But why need I longer delay? Nor will I. Now that congratulations are over, let us proceed to interchange items of news and observation."

"First, pray be seated," said the lawyer, gallantly leading Mrs. Dibbs to a chair close beside his own. "And before we proceed farther, let me say that the Honorable William Dibbs and his accomplished wife are welcome to Sunlight Cottage, the appropriate designation we have conferred upon our happy home."

"So very happy!" murmured Mrs. Craft, casting a glittering smile on the lawyer, which he covertly returned with a mocking leer.

"First impart to me the local news," said Dibbs. "Is it true that you have sold the Green Tree Inn? So the affable clerk informed us as we registered our names for a temporary sojourn."

"Yes, and a very poor price we got for it too. But Mr. Craft, you know, Mr. Dibbs, was always a poor hand at bargains," quickly answered the woman in a mild, even voice.

"True!" laughed the lawyer, with his smile still bland. "I know one very bad bargain I made—in fact, the worst of my life.—But then, in certain matters, men are not so bright as women, Mr. Dibbs. You comprehend?"

"*Oui, monsieur,*" as my linguistic and cultured wife would say," rejoined Dibbs, exchanging sly winks with the lawyer. "This was evidently a case in which your legal acumen was of no avail to evade the issue. Yes, yes!" with a serio-comic air; "I can see how feeble was your defence. I apprehend how speedily the case was

pushed through its cumulated phases, and I opine how unexpectedly you discovered yourself the innocent subject of a declaration, instantly followed by a replication, succeeded by a sur-rejoinder, which in turn gave place to a sur-rebuttal. At last you were inevitably, teetotally and finally quashed by the aforesaid uxorial plaintiff. But tell me, now that we are on the subject of marriage, how comes on Pat Doyle in his new and similar relations?"

"It is exhilarating to behold the Irishman's happiness," replied Craft. "The old miser would scarcely recognize his hut were he to see it now. Pat and his smart little wife have made the place bloom and blossom like a garden in the desert. It was a very generous action on the part of the former Miss Loyd to buy the place from the miser's trustees and present it to Pat. The furniture, you remember, was given to Doyle by the miser's own daughter. Well, Pat and his wife are exceedingly happy now. It was only this morning I met him coming into town with a load of vegetables.

"How goes the honeymoon? Is it over yet?" I called out to him.

"Over, is it?" said he. "Throth, it's jist wid me at its hoight, I'm thinkin'. An' it's 'honey dear' she be sayin' to me all day long wid her sweet lips. But, faix, it's in moighty dread I am o' the day when the little desaiver will be callin' me 'owld beeswax.' For indade the sweet craythurs have a power o' contradicshun in them."

"Doyle is right," laughed Dibbs as the lawyer finished speaking with a little tantalizing smile at Mrs. Craft. "The female mind is sublimely erratic, smiling in its tears and weeping in its laughter."

"Friend Dibbs," asked Craft, suddenly changing the subject, "is it true that the woman we supposed to be Miss Loyd was not only an heiress, but the real mother of Volney Slade, and the legal wife of Seth Slade, who died in the hospital of wounds inflicted by Grundle's dog?"

"Yes, all that is true, and more too," replied Dibbs, "which I will tell you in a few plain words, for simple diction best suits narration. The day following the death of Seth Slade I went with Miss Loyd to the village

of ——. There we gained access to the church register, in which was recorded the marriage of Agnes Wharton to Seth Slade by the rector, who, by the way, was still living. You can judge of our surprise when the clergyman informed us that he had been several years endeavoring to find out the whereabouts of this Agnes Wharton, in response to a letter of inquiry he had received a year after this marriage. Upon getting possession of this letter, we found it to be from a law-firm in Boston, announcing the death of Miss Wharton's father, and that under the will she was sole heir to his fortune. A big fortune it is—as nearly as I can find out, about half a million of dollars."

"Whew!" exclaimed the lawyer; "what a desirable woman! The fellow will be fortunate who treads life's vale with her lovely image smiling upon his care-worn face. How came she to change her name to Aziel Loyd? She never did look like a servant: I always said that."

"It's a short and a bad story, but not for her," resumed Dibbs. "You see, Seth Slade was a perfect scoundrel, and the first thing Agnes knew he had married the woman who subsequently came to Slowville as Mrs. Gagger. By her father's will this woman was to inherit a large fortune if she married and had a son. Slade, knowing this, wedded her for no other purpose than to get possession of the fortune and desert her. She did have a son, but he died the night of his birth. For this dead babe Slade substituted his own child by Agnes Wharton, compelling her, under the lie that they had not been lawfully married, to surrender her child for this purpose, and actually bringing her into the house as the child's nurse under the assumed name of Aziel Loyd."

"The dastardly villain!" ejaculated Mrs. Dibbs.

"The hypocritical fiend!" echoed Mrs. Craft.

"How does Volney Slade fancy his newly-found mother?" asked the lawyer.

"Why, he told me himself that he had always loved her far more than he had his reputed mother. He ought to now if he never did before, for she has bought him Marsh's mill, which was recently sold under the bankrupt law, and Volney is making a small fortune every

day. There will be no more strikes at that mill with Volney Slade managing affairs. The workmen swear by him as stoutly now as they cursed old Marsh before he went up in his financial balloon."

"How did it happen that old Gagger left all his money to his wife?" further questioned Craft. "I was greatly surprised at that."

"Why, it was just like him," laughed Dibbs. "What you would not expect him to do, that very thing he was sure to do. Yes, he left every cent of his property to his wife. He had the will drawn the very day before he died. Just as he breathed his last he pulled the will out from under his pillow and said to his wife: 'Here's a surprise for you. Good-bye!' But Mrs. Gagger did not keep all this money to herself. She gave fifty thousand of it to Silas Gagger Rowe, the old man's nephew, who married Harriet Marsh last week."

"Willie dear, do tell now about the miser and the dog and the sweet, sweet Emily," said his wife, as Dibbs paused to debate what thread of the story he should next take up.

"Yes, that will be a fitting end to the narrative," he resumed.—"Well," addressing himself to the others, "as you already know, Nicholas Grundle was John Sterrit, and Emily was his daughter. It appears that when Emily was four years old John Sterrit, who was somewhat advanced in years, and had always been weak-headed on the subject of a child and heir, conceived the idea of running away with his child and hiding her, himself and his fortune from the world. He did so, taking the name of Nicholas Grundle; and had he not been robbed by Seth Slade, he might be living here yet in that old wayside hut. But that robbery was the means of Nicholas Grundle restoring his child to her mother and himself to his wife. Ah! he is a miserable wreck of a man now—crazy as he can be. Sits all day long in his chair counting pieces of money they give him to play with, and talking in whispers to the dog Cæsar about a tall man with a black beard. He has no idea that Seth Slade is dead, or that nearly all the stolen money was recovered. He did not even recognize his own regained property when it was shown him.

Well, so goes the world. It is a struggle to make money—a struggle to keep it; and while a man is doing either, he drops into the grave without a dollar of it all.

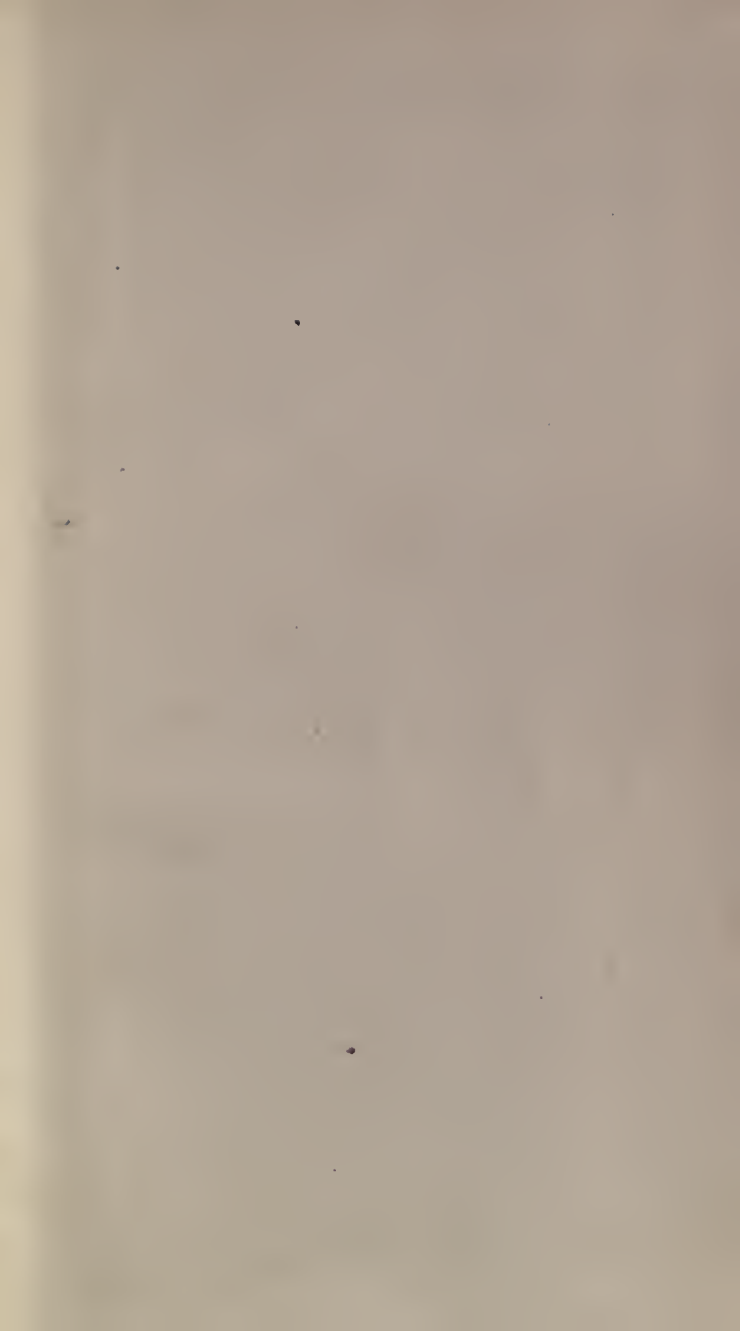
“But to conclude. In two adjoining big brownstone houses in the metropolis are residing the subjects of this brief biographical sketch. Mrs. Gagger and Azriel Loyd, that was, preside over one mansion, and in the other are Volney and his wife, Mrs. Sterrit, crazy old Sterrit and the dog Cæsar.”

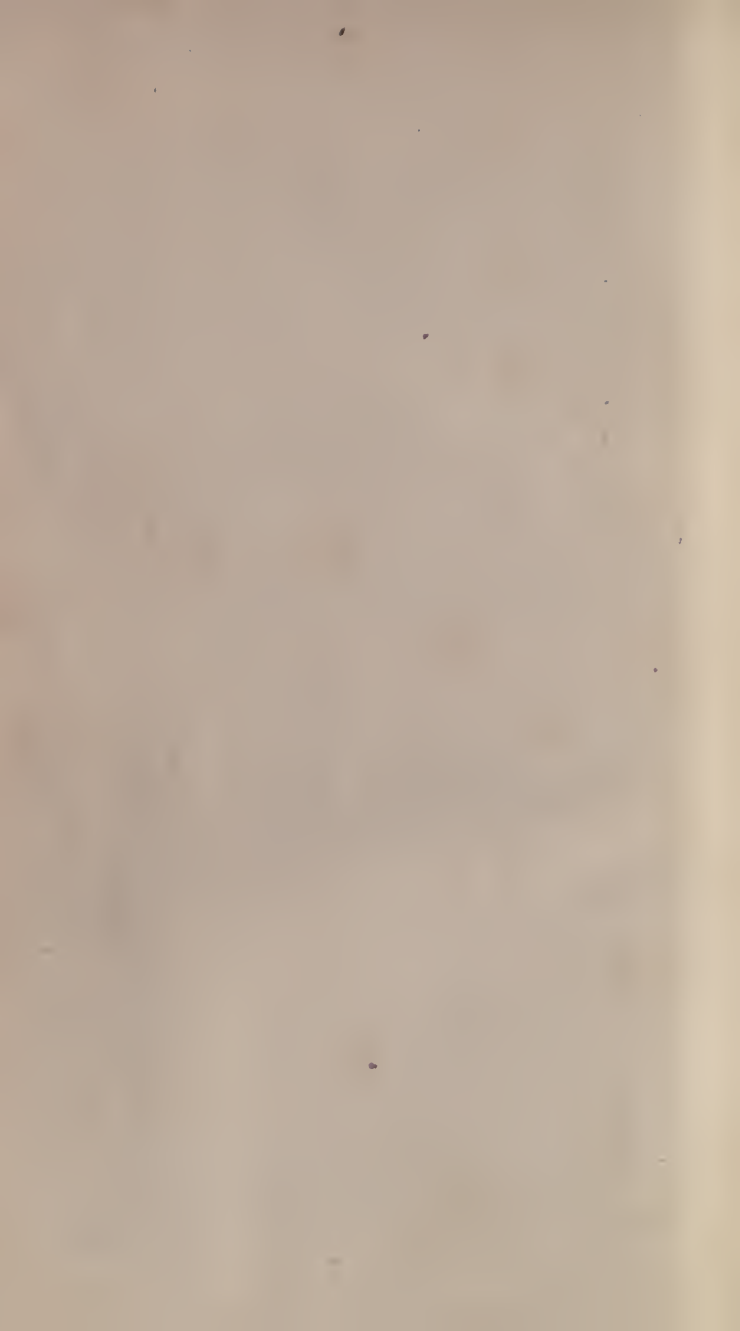
“Now do tell us about yourself, Mr. Dibbs,” interrupted Mrs. Craft with a solicitous smile. “Is it true that Mrs. Slade—I mean she who passed here as Azriel Loyd—gave you twenty-five thousand dollars?”

“That is the identical sum, my dear madam, that Mrs. Slade, *alias* Azriel Loyd, *alias* Agnes Wharton, bestowed upon yours truly because of his former sympathetic friendship. There was but one condition connected with this generous gift—namely, that I should permanently leave the saloon-business.”

“Did you give it up?”

“Most assuredly,” replied Dibbs with emphasis, “did I retire from the public manipulation of manly beverages. I bestowed the Hora Bibendi as a free gift upon Lanty Joy, and forthwith gave my unremitting attention to politics. As your husband previously remarked, I am now a member-elect of the legislature; to speak even more comprehensively, a patriot ready and willing to shed his blood for his country’s good. If you have any little bill for the suppression of matrimonial infelicities which you wish our noble body of lawmakers to consider, my dear madam, please command my services without the usual preliminary *quid pro quo*. But,” rising and gallantly looking at his wife, “the night draws on apace. The eyelids of the bride grow heavy. Spike hops uneasily about his cage for our return. Come, beauteous bride! Let us hence beneath the glittering midnight sky, where stars shine not so brightly as thine liquid eyes, nor moon so softly as the smile playing about thy lovely lips.—Adieu, my friends! May our mutual regret at this temporary parting be the earnest of our future friendship!”







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